

The Ship and The Shore

NOVELS BY VICKI BAUM

CENTRAL STORES
NANKING ROAD
A TALE FROM BALI
CAREER
MEN NEVER KNOW
FALLING STAR
MARTIN'S SUMMER
HELENE
SECRET SENTENCE
RESULTS OF AN ACCIDENT
GRAND HOTEL

VICKI BAUM

The Ship
and
The Shore

GEOFFREY BLES

37 ESSEX STREET, STRAND, LONDON

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First published September, 1941

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE WHITEFRIARS PRESS LTD,
LONDON AND TONBRIDGE

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The Ship

PAT CAME TO A STOP in front of the doctor'sst stateroom. The door stood slightly ajar like those of all the other staterooms on the *Tjaldane*. This gave at least the illusion of a draught or some ventilation, yet the curtain inside hung limp and immobile in the motionless heat. There was not the faintest breeze anywhere. The sea was like molten glass, with here and there wide irregular patches of smooth, oily greens and yellows. The small ventilators worked frantically in the few passengers' cabins, in the officers' quarters, the tiny dining-room and the narrow, veranda-like appendix which the *Tjaldane* proudly called her salon. They buzzed importantly as they pushed the stagnant, moist air into the rooms and out again, utterly busy and entirely ineffective. The sign

"Please do not disturb" dangled from the doctor's door-knob, trembling with the vibration of the boat. Pat didn't pay much attention to it; it had been dangling there ever since she had come aboard in Singapore. She listened to the pleasant, refreshing sounds emerging from the cabin: the clicking of ice cubes in a glass, followed by the short hiss of soda water from a siphon. She plucked her white slacks from the skin of her legs where they had got stuck with the heat, and with her bare arm she wiped the perspiration from her forehead. Now her arm was moist and she rubbed it against her side in a futile attempt to get it dry again. Then she knocked a short tattoo on the door and entered without further ceremony.

"Well!" said Dr Maverick, not looking at her or taking his legs off his miniature desk. "What is it this time?"

"Wrong blood pressure again," Pat said dryly. At that the doctor swung down his legs and appraised her with a swift, attentive glance. Pat was a bit younger than she looked; twenty-four, to be exact. The doctor had seen her passport and even written her birth date into the sketchy chart he had made about her. To his taste she was much, too thin, though pretty in an aggressive yet tired way, like a badly cared-for cut flower. She smiled bravely at him, but her eyelids had that peculiar twitch which meant that she had cried for a while in the solitude of the ladies' room—the only place on the *Tjaldane* where you could hope to be left alone.

"Think some medicine might do you good?" he asked with a grin.

Pat returned the grin amiably. "Can you tell me why they won't sell you a drink before seven o'clock on this blasted boat? Just to make life more miserable?" she

asked. The doctor produced a second glass and mixed a highball for her.

"Only before we are putting into some port," he said. "It's one of the blessed regulations of the S.-B.-M. Line. I suppose it has to do with the Prestige of the White Man in the Far East. Would make a bad impression on the natives if our little bunch of passengers were stewed to the gills when they stumble ashore. Well, cheer up, kid. Here's to you."

"For heaven's sake! Are we making a stop again to-day? I thought this was a ship—but it's a street car with a stop at every corner," Pat said, lifting her glass and looking critically at the lazy little air bubbles in her drink.

"Well, this is going to be a very short one. All we have to do is unload some cargo, put three hundred contract coolies ashore and sail off again. Usually we manage it in two hours."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. But just wait and see what fun it is. You see, the *Tjaldane* is about the only halfway decent boat that ever lands there, and the whole place is waiting for those two hours when we are in port. It's the big event in their lives and it occurs only twice a month—on our way from Singapore to Manila and when we return from there. Want more ice in yours?"

"No, thanks," Pat said absent-mindedly.

The doctor had emptied his glass and refilled hers. He grumbled as he poked into his large thermos bottle for ice. "The man who'd invent some ice cubes that wouldn't melt at a hundred and ten degrees could make a fortune in this part of the world," he said.

Pat's answer bore no relation whatever to his remark.

"Mr Anderson stood me off again, Doc; he didn't play ping-pong with me this morning," she said, still with the same forced smile.

He gave her another quick, examining glance. "Who would, in this temperature?" he said. "Andy's no fool, he knows his tropics. He doesn't waste his energy in useless activities. He won't shed a single drop of sweat unnecessarily."

"No, Mr Anderson always seems to look cool, doesn't he? But he *did* play ping-pong, useless or not. With that girl."

"Oh," the doctor said. "Well! Have another drink."

"That Girl" was a certain Miss Josephine Halden. Mr Anderson called her Jeff. She had come aboard in Batavia with her father, a shy, white-haired little gentleman who looked like a retired professor, and she had wrecked all Pat's fragile castles-in-the-air. Pat gulped down her second highball and held the empty glass out for more.

"Ice is gone," the doctor reported.

"It doesn't matter, that makes it British. Let's call it a stengah as they do in Singapore," she said.

"All right. Cheerio," said the doctor.

Pat, after the third highball, felt somewhat cooler though much thirstier than before. Dr Maverick had switched to drinking his straight. She watched him with a puzzled expression on her face, the face of a sun-tired pansy. "Doc, do you think this stuff is good for you?" she asked sternly.

"For me or for you?"

"For both of us."

"No, my girl," he answered, "it's not good for us, not in any accepted sense, not from any moral or medical

or conventional viewpoint. But let me tell you something. If you are living as I have lived for eight years, always on this boat, always sailing up and down the equator, taking six hundred contract coolies from Singapore to Batavia and three hundred from Batavia to Deli, always the same struggle to keep them in some semblance of health, always the heat, the stench, the dirt, always the same trip, the same ports—always Semarang, Banjoewangi, Timor, Flores, Sebang, Macassar, Zamboanga, Manila—with nothing but a little smallpox epidemic or a typhoid fever quarantine or a middle-sized typhoon thrown in for entertainment: then, my child, drinking is very good for you. It is, in fact, the only thing that keeps you going."

While he spoke he too had become more serious than was his habit. There followed a little silence, interrupted only by the thin, trembling sound of the bottle in his shaky hand as it touched the rim of the glass.

"If it's so bad on this boat, why do you stay on it?" Pat asked at last.

"That's a long story and not a very pretty one. Maybe I'll tell it to you—someday, when I'm very drunk and very sorry for myself," he said with his usual grin. "Anyway, I might ask you the same question. Why are you on this boat? As far as I know, you had your passage booked and paid for on the *Koto Maru*, which is a perfect super-de-luxe liner as Japanese boats go. By now you could be almost back in the States if you hadn't chosen to meander with us from one confounded island of the Netherlands Indies to the next instead of taking the straight course home."

"I'm in no particular hurry to go back to the States."

"No?"

"No."

"Well then, I don't know who's cried with homesickness twice since last Thursday and who had to be given overdoses of Bromural and who's been drinking at least one third of my good whisky because the yearning for Azusa, Cal., has become unbearable."

"I wasn't crying because I'm homesick, and you know it," said Pat.

"I've learned one thing on this and other boats. There are only two sorts of people travelling, and both are bound to land nowhere. There are the homesick ones—they want to get back, get home, get there fast and settle down, but they never do. And there are the restless ones—they want to keep going, going, they are chasing the far-away, but when they arrive there the far-away is somewhere else where they never get. As for girls who travel alone, there is one very simple rule: they are either running away from a man, or after a man, or to a man. Now, which sort are you?"

"Me? I'm a bit of everything, I guess. Restless and homesick at the same time. Running away from men and running after a man. Why do you ask me? You know what's the matter with me."

"Rama, Vishnu and Shiva, ye holy gods! Did you really come on this boat with bag and bundle just to run after Anders Anderson? I can't believe it," the doctor said, but he did not grin any longer.

"Why not? Isn't he worth it? Isn't love worth taking a chance?"

Dr Maverick settled back on his bunk, from where he had a better view of Pat, who had curled up on his only chair. This tiny, sticky stateroom had become quite a

home in her homeless life, a little cave into which to retreat when Mr Anderson and That Girl hurt her too much. The doctor was the right type of a cave man too: tall and broad of shoulders, stripped to the waist, red-haired, yet with a white skin which no tropical sun could darken. There were lots of freckles sprayed all over him, and a few blisters on his chest from his last sunburn. Maybe his muscles had become a bit flabby and his eyes were bloodshot from too much alcohol and from the merciless radiance of the equatorial sun on the Indian Ocean. Maybe he was what Pat called "a bit chipped off around the edges." She liked him the better for it, because she herself wasn't as sound and undamaged as she had been a few years ago. With Dr Maverick you needn't be ashamed of anything, and it was no use keeping secrets from him or telling him fibs. He was a great comfort, and she liked him. "I like you, Doc," she said innocently. Seen through the sweet smoke veils of a native cigarette, she seemed to him prettier and younger than ten minutes ago. He had reached that pleasant state of relaxation which came to him only after a few drinks. What a brave little tramp she is, he thought kindly.

"Go on, shoot," he said. "Get it off your chest if you must, kid. Last time we got as far as Port Said. We've met the wonderful Mr Anderson and danced three dollars' worth of taxi dances with him. But we haven't told yet how we got to Port Said in the first place and how we got away from it in the second."

"You know Port Said?" Pat asked.

"Do I know it? It's a paradise for drunken sailors. But I assume it must be undiluted hell for an American girl. How in the world did you ever get there?"

"Don't you know there is not a joint or dive anywhere in the world where you won't find some stranded American show girl? How did I get there? It's such an old story, it isn't even funny."

"It's a long way from a nice bungalow in Azusa to a dance hall in Port Said, though."

"You said it, Doc. I guess what started me off on the wrong foot was being the Orange Queen of Azusa six years ago. It's the sort of thing that puts ideas into your head. You try Hollywood--no go. Then you try New York--no go, either. Then you set your teeth and write cheerful letters to the folks back home and you take lessons, you learn tap dancing and singing and if you are a size twelve you may get a little job here and a little job there--but they never last. Night clubs have a funny way of folding up or changing their policy just when you least expect it. Then you find yourself on the street and you are too stubborn to go home. . . ."

"And then?" Dr Maverick said when Pat stopped and was lost in some remembrances which drew harsh lines into her peaked face. He knew the Pats and their stories. He had met them and listened to their confidences in many ports of the world. There was nothing new or different in what she had to tell; but let her get it out of her system--it'll do her good, the poor kid. . . .

"Then you get the chance of your life," Pat went on. "There's a manager who's going to take twelve girls to Paris and he's giving you an audition. You're trembling with stage fright and you just know you won't be good enough for them and you almost get a stroke when they pick you as one of the twelve from a bunch of two hundred and sixty. You feel you're on top of the world and

you get yourself some new clothes and go to Paris. And there you are."

"Yes? What's the matter with Paris?"

"It's the greatest let-down of your life. You're ashamed of the joint where you are dancing, it's no-good place for tourists who want to see the sinful life of the big city and you're afraid all the time someone from Azusa might drop in and discover you there. Then they fire six of the twelve girls and you want to go back to the States. But there is a hitch in your contract, see? You have to pay your own fare back and of course you haven't got the money. So you take whatever you can get, because you've just got to save up enough money to go home to the States. Before you know it you are down in those Bohunk towns, Bucharest, Sofia, Athens—ever been in Athens? Well, I have. Had to stay there in hospital for almost six weeks. Boy, that yellow dust from the Piraeus. I won't forget it if I live to be a hundred. What happened to me? Well, I had a cold and a little temperature and I must have been dizzy when I was dancing, because the next thing I knew was that I had broken an ankle. That's enough to throw you out of gear forever. The troupe goes on and you are left behind in some hospital with five thousand pounds of plaster on your left leg. After four days in bed your cold has turned into pneumonia. From then on you are just driftwood. The broken foot isn't what it used to be and you're not as young as other girls and not as strong as before and the forty-two dollars you had saved up are gone to the last nickel. That's how you become a taxi dancer at the Nirvana in Port Said—and the things you don't learn there about men aren't worth learning. And that's how

Mr Anderson found me and that's the place from where he took me away. And if you can give me any reason why he should have done it—"

"Maybe he was drunk," Dr Maverick suggested.

But Pat shook her head emphatically. "No, he was not. If he had been drunk, or just crazy as men on shore leave are, he might have given me money and made passes at me. But he only danced with me and talked with me, as nice and polite as if we were in my mother's parlour. And the following morning he comes back and tells me to pack my things because he has booked my passage on the same boat on which he's travelling east, and he treated me like no one had treated me since I left my parents' home. No, I may be a fool, but there is only one explanation if a man acts like that, isn't there? Now tell me, Doc, isn't there?"

"Offhand I could offer a second one," he said. "Did it ever occur to you he might have done it simply out of plain kindness and decency?"

She pushed her hair back from her forehead and shook her head. It's her hair that gives her that look of a wilting flower, the doctor thought. It was fine and silky like a baby's, platinum blonde at the ends but chestnut brown at the roots, because Pat had given up bleaching since she had met Mr Anderson.

"Mind you, he didn't put me on any old boat and send me home. It would have been the simple thing to get me home by way of Genoa and the Atlantic, wouldn't it? But he booked my passage on the same boat on which he was travelling, and he made it sound as if it was the most natural thing to go back to the States across the Orient. He said he liked my company. He said he

had been bored and lonesome on that boat—a P. & O. it was. He said we could have two delightful weeks together. He said it was too bad we'd have to part in Singapore, but he would put me on the *Koto Maru* and see me safely off before he took the *Tjaldane* and sailed for Sebang. He said he was happy we had met, he said he would miss me an awful lot once he was back on his rubber plantation. Oh yes, he put ideas into my head all right—till that girl came aboard and busted it all."

"So that's how it was. I can see it now," the doctor said musingly. "You know, men get funny when they have lived in the tropics for a number of years. They don't know the rules of the game. They have dropped some conventions——"

"You don't know how it was on that P. & O. boat, Doc," she said dreamily. "It was heaven. It's heaven if you—if you like someone, and you're on the same boat with him. You know he can't get away. When you wake up in the morning you're sure you are going to see him at breakfast. Mr Anderson had arranged it so we had a little table for us alone, just like married people. And he had his deck chair moved next to mine and he showed me how to play shuffleboard. And he danced almost never with anyone but me—he said he liked my dancing best. And he played all his records for me—you know, on his little victrola of which he's so proud. Well now he is playing them for that girl, and you can imagine how I feel when I hear them. And he took me to the boat deck and explained the stars to me. And he told me a lot about himself and about his mother. He's very fond of his mother—you know; she lives in Denmark and he had been home on leave to visit her. I think it's the finest compli-

ment a man can pay a girl like me if he tells her about his mother. He said there had been snow in Copenhagen when he left—he told it so I could almost see it. The plane was taking off and there was his mother, a small old lady in black, standing on that white airfield and waving to him till the snowflakes blurred everything. He has such a funny way of pronouncing it: 'Kop'n-houn.' I always liked the Danes, they are a decent sort, almost like Americans. He never asked me any questions and he never made passes at me. When he danced with me it gave me a feeling as if I were made of the finest china, sort of. You may call me a fool, Doc, but it's no wonder I got ideas—"

"Pat," the doctor said sternly, "you're as sentimental as an advertisement for baby soap. What did you dream of? Orange blossoms? Wedding bells? Eventually twins who'd make the old lady in Copenhagen a grandmother?"

Pat laughed. "I don't know. Dreams aren't that definite. The sort of curtains I would have in my kitchen. Baking waffles on Sunday morning and the smell of it. Waking up in the middle of the night and knowing that the rent is paid. Not to be knocked around anymore. Belonging to someone—"

"Look here, Pat, now I'm going to tell you a thing or two. It may hurt you as much as it hurt you when they set your broken ankle, but it'll do you good. I've known Andy quite a number of years, and I know the sort of man he is. He's a decent sort all right, but there are no chintz curtains or Sunday waffles in his life. I've asked him how he feels about you, and here is what he said: He'd have done the same for any tramp on the road and for any lost dog. That's Anders Anderson for you."

"Doesn't sound very romantic, does it?" Pat asked

from behind her wall of cigarette smoke. She had just remembered, with a stabbing little pain, that Mr Anderson had given her the nickname "Pooch." She had thought it cute at the time.

"There's no place for romance in Andy's life. He's in love with rubber and more rubber and yet more rubber. Fighting the jungle, pushing civilization ahead another mile against four million obstacles, that's the only thrill he knows. And believe me, it's a better thrill than dancing with a girl or flirting on the boat deck. To him a girl doesn't mean any more than this cigarette or another glass of whisky does to me."

And with this the doctor threw the end of his cigarette through the porthole and filled their glasses again. Pat's stubborn and petulant expression had changed and brightened as he reached his conclusion.

"So you think he doesn't really care for that girl either?" she said triumphantly.

The doctor threw up his hands in despair. "O women, women!" he cried. "Do you have to go around with a pot of pink paint and smear it over every inch of this world? Can't you swallow the truth—must it be rammed down your throat?"

"It's hot, isn't it?" Pat said, trying to divert the doctor from the subject. He lighted himself another cigarette and tossed an old, frayed palm-leaf fan to her.

"Shall I tell you when you made your big mistake?" he asked thoughtfully. "It was when you left the *Koto Maru* and came after Andy with bag and baggage. Did you see his face when you appeared on this boat? He didn't look very pleased—or did he? He had been a good Boy Scout and done his good deed, putting you safely on

your way home to Azusa. He certainly didn't want you to follow him around like a *njai*."

"What's a *njai*?" Pat asked. Her face had shrunk a bit and looked pinched behind its veil of cigarette smoke.

"Don't you know? It's an old institution in the Dutch East Indics—a native housekeeper. Every bachelor on the plantations has his *njai*. They are a great comfort, I must say—cooking for the master, fixing his bath, keeping his things clean, catering to his every need. They are so submissive it's almost inhuman. They carry his baggage and follow him around at a respectful distance. They speak only if spoken to, never cry, never demand anything. And when the master fires them they make *goona-goona* and try to poison him."

Pat contemplated this with a dreamy smile. "Sounds good," she said after she had come to a conclusion.

"The following around or the poisoning?" the doctor asked.

"You think I'm crazy, don't you? But I was very sensible when I changed boats at Singapore. It's been quite a simple piece of arithmetic," she said. "I knew it would take me six weeks longer to get home. But I knew also that I would be two more weeks with Mr Anderson before he reached Sebang. Maybe you don't know it, but to be happy for two whole weeks is no trifling matter. Sometimes I think there are very few people in this world who've ever been happy for two whole weeks."

"You're quite a philosopher, Pat, aren't you? Well, you've been happy all the way from Port Said to Singapore and from Singapore to Batavia; that's something—even if your arithmetic didn't quite work between Java and Celebes. It's tough luck that girl came aboard—but then,

tonight she will feel just as you felt in Singapore. She'll say goodbye to Andy knowing that she'll never see him again. Only difference, she won't pack her bundle and run after him. Because she is a lady and you are a silly, emotional, spontaneous little tramp."

"Tonight? But he isn't leaving the boat tonight?" Pat said; of the whole sermon she had heard only this one word. "We won't get to Sebang tonight? The *hofmeester* told me only yesterday we wouldn't get there before tomorrow morning."

"Oh yes, we'll be in tonight-and off again. We are ahead of schedule. Seems Captain Brookhuis had orders to speed up a little."

Suddenly Pat's face was drained of all colour and her mouth was getting dry. "So it's tonight then. Good! Okay with me. I never liked to wait at the dentist's," she said with a broken little laugh.

"Steady now, steady, kid," Dr Maverick said and came up from his bunk. "We're not going to get hysterical now. We're going to behave beautifully because we're an American girl. We belong to a very proud race and we've been the Orange Queen of Azusa. Good gracious, Pat, don't you know yet that no man is worth all the heartbreak? Before we get to Manila you'll laugh about all this."

A slight stir of air plucked at the curtain in the open door and made it ripple and gently sway. Pat shivered. "It's getting cold," she said, gathering up her brave little smile and slipping it over her face like a poorly matched make-up.

The doctor looked out of the porthole. "Sun is setting soon," he said. She has only between 70 and 80 per cent

haemoglobin, he thought. I hope her folks in Azusa can afford to feed her well. He grabbed his Chinese robe from a hook and wrapped it around her.

"What you need is another drink," he said as he bent down to bring out a new whisky bottle.

II

THE SAME FIRST STIR of the evening breeze which made Pat shiver wafted a heavy cloud of mixed smells from the lower deck up to the rail where Anders Anderson waited with Jeff Halden for the sunset.

"There it is again," Jeff said. "What, in heaven's name, makes them smell so?"

"Mostly chicken feet," he said with a grin. Her nostrils were quivering; they had the proud shape and vibrancy he had seen only in Arabian horses; they were fine and transparent, pink on the inside, like the little shells he liked to pick up on the shores of Tanatua. For a second he was a little boy again and he heard his Javanese *babu* call to him: "*Tida, Tuan kitjil, tida.*" He shook his head and came quickly back into Jeff's enchanting presence. "It's the Chinese coolies," he said. "They believe that a powder of dried chicken feet is strong medicine, that's why they keep them. Unfortunately it takes some time before they are dried, and the interim is not too fragrant."

Jeff hung precariously over the rail; she was possessed by the all-devouring curiosity of a little mungo. "I can

see them, Andy," she cried, "it's true. There must be thousands of chicken feet. Goodness, how they smell!"

The whole side of the boat was adorned with them, a crazy pattern of pairs of chicken feet in all stages of deterioration. A strand of Jeff's dark hair was gently blown against Anders' cheek. Her elbow touched his as they hung over the rail to look at the mephitic display, and a little electric shock contracted his throat and sent a sweet tingling down his spine. Anders Anderson was a shy young giant, perpetually embarrassed by the sensation that everything about him took up more space than was fair. Josephine Halden was a tall girl, but she came only up to his mouth, and he used up a lot of good energy in the effort to refrain from kissing her hair which danced so closely before him.

"Come, let's go over to starboard," he said. "They are taking off the awnings."

The lower deck began to come to life with the coolness of the late afternoon, and now, as the canvas was rolled back which had protected it against the sun, they could look straight into the strange, teeming anthill life of the Orient. Each family had settled down on its own mat, had made a home of a few square feet on the deck, had established its complete little world there, with parents and wives, with bundles and pots, with babies, ducks and chickens. They quarrelled and made it up, they cried and laughed, they drank and ate, they gambled, won and lost, they prayed in many dialects and to many different gods, they slept and begat children, they died and gave birth: all in the open, all on the lower deck of the *Tjaldane*, a 5,000-ton steamer of the S.-B.-M. Line, plying between Singapore, Batavia and Manila. Jeff

never grew tired of watching them, and Anders never grew tired of watching her watching them. Her lively face mirrored every one of her quick reactions, and her fingers twitched on the rail. From time to time she had to blow away the strand of hair which disturbed her view. It was amazing how dear and important that little gesture had become to Anders. He wondered whether he might put his big hand over hers and, after some hesitation, risked it. She smiled fleetingly up into his face and returned with concentrated attention to the lower deck.

"Humanity without make-up," she said. "How poor they are—and how content!"

Anders cleared his throat. "Jeff—" he said. "Josephine—darling—"

A cry of many voices rose from down there. A circle had formed around a tall, thin Chinese. Men scurried from all the mats, pushing their way into the centre of the group, while the women remained where they were, their indifferent, blunt faces bent over their cooking, their babies riding on their hips or bundled to their backs, Chinese fashion.

"What is he telling them? What are they shouting?" Jeff asked. The Chinese seemed very excited as he spoke to them. He was all muscles and sinews and bones under his open, ragged and patched coolie jacket. He drummed with both his fists against his emaciated chest, which shone with sweat or oil like an old darkened, time-polished piece of ivory. "What is it?" Jeff asked urgently.

Andy shrugged. "I can't get it. It's all pidgin Malay," he said. "Come, let's go aft. We have to watch for the Green Ray."

Jeff let him take her away. The commotion on the

lower deck ended as suddenly as it had begun, dissolving in shouts and laughter, and the men returned to their mats and families. Jeff sighed. "I wish I could talk to them. I wish I could understand them and know every one of them by name. I wish—"

"You wish the world were a cake and you could eat it all at a sitting, is that it?" Anders asked teasingly. They had been down to the lower deck for several visits and Jeff had managed to get acquainted with a few of the coolie wives and babies by some esperanto of her own, accompanied by gifts of small kesks, old blouses and candy. Anderson had been faintly bored by these trips. The coolies who fascinated her as something new and exotic were his daily bread. It was one thing to watch them as one of the picturesque sights of a world cruise and another thing to be responsible for three hundred of them, to make them work, to keep them in discipline, to bear up with their laziness, their indolence, their squalor and their smoldering, hidden, yet ever-present opposition.

They went to the other side and took their place at the rail, as they had done every afternoon at six, to watch the sun go down and to see the Green Ray. The Green Ray was something that belonged to them alone and they hadn't told anyone about it. You could see it if you half closed your eyes just at the moment when the last spark of the great golden disc sank below the horizon. You had to hold your breath and not say a word, and you had to stand very close together for it. They called it the Green Ray because the languages they knew had no word for its translucent, unearthly colour, neither Jeff's English and Dutch nor Andy's English and Danish, not even his Malay.

For a moment the whole world held its breath as the sun disappeared below the distant rim of the sea. "Now it's gone," Jeff said into the stillness.

"Yes—now it's gone," Anders repeated.

The ocean was a softly rounded bowl filled with opals, bright with the last reflection of the sky. Choppy little waves leaped against the sides of the boat, and its wake trailed after them like a long, sweeping bridal train, embroidered with pearls. A small fleet of native fishing boats glided past them; their beautiful square sails did not seem real in the strange light. With their enormous, magic eyes—cream-coloured rings around a darker circle—they found their way towards the distant home shore. Now a few atolls came in sight, flat and two-dimensional, their contours naïve, like the simple drawings of a child. The breeze had grown stronger and the sea looked cold and clear against the golden, shining haze which spread like a fan over the sky where the sun had sunk.

"What did you think when the sun went down?" he asked her.

"And you?"

"Yes. The same," he answered. The reflection of the orange sky on her face. Her left eyebrow a bit higher than the right one, as if she were perpetually wondering at the things she saw. The seven freckles on her forehead. The firm line of her chin. Her eyes. Her smile. The strand of dark hair that always came loose. I've got to remember this, he thought fervently. I've got to take it with me, I've got to hold onto it and never forget it. . . .

"Tomorrow at six I'll be alone with the Green Ray," she said.

"Yes, Jeff—darling—"

"And you? Where will you be?"

"In some dull place, presumably. Going over the pay roll of the coolies. Inspecting the newly planted trees, visiting the coagulation plant, controlling the tapping. I am what they call an inspector on the plantation—all I do is inspecting. No, there won't be any Green Ray for me, but I shall think of you tomorrow at six."

The sea had become darker and the flying fish which leaped across the small waves looked almost black against the flaming sky. Near the horizon three compact little clouds were in a hurry to get somewhere before dark. Suddenly they were ablaze with red and scarlet and crimson in all the splendour of a tropical sunset. A new waft of smells rose from the lower deck. Jeff began to laugh softly.

"That's funny," she said. "When other girls remember their first love it's all roses and gardenias and perfumes by Prince Matchabelli and Chanel 5. But when I think of you it will always be rotten chicken feet!"

It was the first time that the word "love" had been spoken between them, and it hit Anders in the pit of the stomach.

"Jeff—" he said.

"Yes, Anders."

No, he couldn't even kiss her, because all twelve passengers of the *Tjaldane* had come on deck to watch the sunset, and all around them was a polyglot flurry of languages, in which English prevailed. The fat *hofmeester*, as the purser was called on this Dutch boat, had taken his place quite near them; he was hovering over the French opera singer from Saigon touring Java and the Philippines. She tittered with amusement over his heavy

Dutch gallantries as she fanned herself with a black Javanese fan. On Anders' left elbow Pat Houston had sidled up with her pal, the doctor. "Hello there," she said as Anders' unseeing glance passed over her. "Hello," he answered in a distracted way. Further down the rail the two Austrians were leaning, Herr and Frau Ritter, rotund and sentimental, exclaiming little Achs and Ohs of admiration and holding each other's pudgy hand. Miss Vanger, the English author who was travelling between the islands in the pursuit of a nebulous series of articles on the Japanese influence in the South Seas, had assumed her sunset pose. With her scarf flying, her tall and bony figure turned towards the breeze, she had a feeling of herself which was faintly in the line of the Winged Victory. She and Madame Dufour, the French singer, shared Cabin C and hated each other, for Miss Vanger, being English, wanted the porthole open and Madame Dufour, being French, wanted it closed. Madame Dufour suffered from *mal de mer*, while Miss Vanger was strong and healthy as a plough horse. Miss Vanger loathed perfumes, Madame Dufour smelt like a heathen idol swathed in musk and incense. And though the two ladies had only one wash basin between them, they had reached the stage where they did not speak to each other or even seem to notice each other's existence.

Pat's roommate was Mrs Gould, the widow of a Mormon missionary; she had seen too many tropical sunsets in her stormy life to be interested. She was cheerfully thrashing around in the canvas bag filled with tepid water which took the place of a swimming pool on the *Tjaldane*. A quiet young man, wandering around in search for a ping-pong partner, was George Carpenter,

he brother of the famous Australian flier who had last been sighted three years ago flying over the jungles of Borneo. George did not like to talk about it, but Anders, who shared his cabin, knew that he had been travelling from island to island ever since, still in the hope either of finding his brother alive or of obtaining definite proof of his death. Even Captain Brookhuis, much too tall and heavy for his small boat, had come down from his bridge, stopping next to Jeff to speak a few words in Dutch to her. But most disturbing of them all was Jeff's father, a timid, white-haired, frail old gentleman, who took his constitutional in the company of portly Mr Vandengraaf, the famous mind reader. Every time he came past Jeff and Anderson he averted his face and tiptoed by, apologetic, pretending not to notice them and fairly screaming with discretion.

A few seconds ago they had been close and alone on an enchanted island all their own. Now cold sweat trickled down Anderson's neck and he realized that the whole boat had been watching them.

"We'll be in port shortly after seven," Captain Brookhuis told Jeff. "By now you can see the shore quite clearly—if you'd care to look through my field glasses."

Yes, there it was, where the sea looked darker and the tropical night fell from the skies like a swiftly dropping curtain after a short play. Anders couldn't keep his heart from beating faster, for this was his island and his work and he had been away for six months. The shore still seemed not more than a flat cloud floating on the waters, but he could recognize the peaked outline of the mountains beyond the foothills of Sebang

"Let's go up to the boat deck," he told Jeff. "I'll get my field-glasses and explain everything to you."

Up there they were alone, except for two sailors who seemed tremendously busy with some preparations for the landing, and, of course, the entire lower deck from where the coolies could watch them as if they were on a stage especially erected for their entertainment.

"Can you see the dark strip between the shore and the first range of hills?" Anders asked as Jeff screwed the field-glasses back and forth. "That's Lombok. That's my plantation. Can you see how it cuts into the jungle? Where the treetops look like tangled green wool, that's jungle. When I first came to Sebang, almost the whole district looked like that. Now we have a plantation of thousands and thousands of Hevea trees, and more than half of them older than six years. I wish I could show it to you. Can you see it through the glasses?"

"Yes, of course," said Jeff. She couldn't see a thing because she had got the glasses wet with tears. Anyway, it was better to cry into binoculars than to cry openly. The boat had turned to the north, and in the falling dusk the whitish wake curved and followed after them. Gently pitching, the *Tjaldane* took her course toward the shore. After Jeff had got rid of the tears in her eyes she could even recognize a few houses along the distant pier which quickly came closer, growing bigger and more distinct with every minute.

"Half an hour and we'll be there," she said.

"Yes, but she'll stay in port at least until nine. That's another two hours," Anders answered.

"Two hours is a lot of time, isn't it?" Jeff said after a while.

"Time is the most relative thing in the world," he said. "Just think, it's not even three weeks that I've known you, and I can hardly remember anything that happened before that period."

Jeff began to smile. "Are you glad we've met?" she asked him.

"Glad? Heavens, no. I'll never be as I have been before I met you, and that is really too bad."

"How have you been?"

"I can only say it in Malay: *senang*. It's something between being content and being happy. But then the Malays have no word for 'love,' maybe that's why they can be *senang*. Oh, Jeff, it will be hell never to see you again."

"Never is a long time. I don't believe in Never," she said. A loud, long-drawn-out cry broke loose from the coolies on the lower deck, but Jeff didn't seem to hear it. She looked with an abstracted yet intense expression into Anders' eyes.

"You couldn't ask me to marry you, could you?" she said then.

"No. That I couldn't do," he answered quickly.

"Is there—I mean—is there another girl?"

It made him laugh. "Oh, my stupid darling!" he said.

Jeff, with puckered brow, followed her own trend of thoughts. "What about this Miss Houston?" she asked.

"Well, what about her?" Anders was slightly uncomfortable.

"Somebody told me you cared a lot for her."

"Who is this somebody, may I ask?"

"Mr Vandengraaf, the mind reader," Jeff said.

"The skunk!" was all Anders had to say. For some reason it made Jeff feel much better.

"Well then, if you don't care for any other girl—and if you do care for me——" she said tentatively.

Anders took her hands in his and tried to be articulate. "Look here, Jeff darling," he said, "marriage and all that has no place in my scheme of things. I'm not made for it. Lombok is no place for a woman. It's too dangerous. It's full of the most unromantic, petty, mean dangers. Mosquitoes, malaria, dysentery, fevers; five hundred sorts of itches and a thousand sort of belly-aches. The company doesn't want married men on the Estate, and they are right."

"And you—you wouldn't give up Lombok?"

"Give up Lombok? Not for the throne of Denmark! It's my work, it's my life. Give up Lombok!"

"Not even for me?"

"Sorry, Jeff. Not even for you."

Jeff held bravely onto her smile. "You are not much of a liar, are you?" she said softly. "Well, then it is good-bye. Are you going to write me a postcard once in a while?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how to say the right things. Maybe we'll meet again someday, somewhere. I'm going on leave every third year——"

"Don't talk, Anders, be quiet," Jeff whispered. "Just let me hold on to your hand—it hurts so—it's like an operation. Silly. I thought all the time that it was only a little boat flirtation. I didn't realize it would be like this——"

"Darling, darling, darling——"

"Come, tell me a joke or something; don't let me talk sentimental pap. We'll be so far apart, we can't even look at the same stars and think of each other as they do in books. I wish I had never seen the Southern

Cross. I wish I had never met you. How long do you think it will take me to forget you?"

The next moment he found her in his arms, and he had to kiss her even if all the coolies of the Netherlands Indies looked on. He covered her face, her temples, her hair with the bitter-sweet kisses of an early farewell. Her eyes were salt with tears and her lips with the spray of the ocean. Little lights were bobbing over the waters, and the shore came quickly closer. A roaring, booming blast of steam from the funnel, salute to the port, broke their embrace and they parted, breathlessly.

"We're landing," Jeff whispered.

"Not yet," he whispered back.

"*Licht van mijn oogen*," she said in Dutch.

"*Min forste Koerlighed og min sidste*," he answered in Danish.

III

OLD MR HALDEN felt somewhat exhausted after his brisk walk forty times around the deck, the daily ritual on which his cabin mate, the mind-reader Vandengraaf, insisted. He had crept into his bunk and listened to the slow and strenuous pumping of his heart. Being a very polite man, he had taken the upper berth and let Vandengraaf have the lower one. When he opened his eyes, all he could see was the slow procession of ants marching across the whitewashed nuts and bolts of the ceiling, so close that he could touch it with his outstretched hand.

Down there Vandengraaf was rummaging among his things, whistling at the same time his own adaptation of Bach's "Prelude in E Flat Minor." Vandengraaf loved music and, not having learned to play any instrument, had somehow learned how to whistle with gusto and great inner satisfaction the entire classical repertoire. Whistling he roamed the seven seas, whistling he ate and drank, dressed and took his bath ; he whistled when he was distressed, he whistled when he was happy. He whistled when he played chess, which drove his opponents crazy, and Halden, who didn't sleep very well, claimed that he had heard him whistle a minuet by Mozart while sound asleep. Vandengraaf was a heavy-set, middle-aged man, bald-headed and big-nosed, and Halden had taken a certain liking to his roommate.

"Here it is," Vandengraaf said in Dutch, shoving a big scrapbook into Halden's bunk. "Here you can read it with your own eyes, the whole case of the Szceheny jewels. You didn't believe me, did you? Luckily the Budapest police headquarters had more faith in my telepathic power. All they could give me was an empty envelope with an address scrawled on it—and I unravelled the whole case for them. On the next page you'll find my photo with the Sultan of Surakarta. He called for me because there was some funny business going on in his Kraton; some of his children dwindled away—*goona-goona*, you know. Did I tell you that I am a specialist in breaking *goona-goona* spells?"

"Vandengraaf, if you really could read my mind you would know that you bore me to death, you and your scrapbook," Halden said without looking at the proffered proofs of the mind-reader's achievements. "I believe

neither in *goona-goona* nor in your telepathic swindle. Your little stories make most interesting dinner conversation with Miss Vanger and the French lady, but I feel slightly insulted that you are trying them on me."

"I have told my little stories to sold-out houses in every metropolis of the world," Vandengraaf answered, not in the least intimidated. "I have helped more people than I can remember. I could help you if you would let me."

"Many thanks, Vandengraaf. I am not aware of needing any help."

"Oh yes, you do. You worry about your health—and you are afraid to die," said Vandengraaf without looking at Halden. But Halden knew that he watched him through the small mirror above the washstand and was on his guard. "Before you started out on this trip, your doctors told you to straighten out your affairs and for the rest to have a good time and enjoy yourself as best you could," Vandengraaf went on. "As you are no fool, you know exactly what their advice meant. That's why you bundled up your daughter and went on this sentimental journey with her. You want to have a last fling at life, but you are not enjoying yourself because you're afraid of death. At night you lie awake and listen to your own heartbeat and you think: How long will it last? How's that for a small sample of mind reading, Mynheer?"

"Clever. Damn clever, I admit," Halden said with a chuckle. "How much money are you making a year with this *lugubre* variety of tricks?"

"I hope someday you'll visit me in my home in Bandoeng and you will see that I make quite a comfortable living."

"Thanks for the invitation. I'm even willing to let you go on with your analysis—but, mind you, I am not going to pay a cent for it."

"Good! But I have to touch something that belongs to you; it is all a matter of vibrations, you understand."

Halden thrust his hand into the pocket of the white surah coat he had flung onto the foot of his bunk and brought it back with his passport. "This should greatly assist in bringing about the correct vibrations," he said, very amused. "At least you won't have to fumble for my age, height or nationality."

Vandengraaf vanished from Halden's sight as he sat down on his own berth. He didn't look at the passport but closed his eyes, as he fingered it nervously in his long, well-shaped hands.

"You are not what you seem to be," he said.

"And what, may I ask, do I seem to be?" Halden asked from above.

"You seem to be the most timid, most polite, most unpretentious passenger on this boat. You seem to be as unobtrusive as a mouse and as modest as a Sunday-school teacher. But behind you I see—wait—big buildings—money rolling—could it be a bank? Now I see—a ship—a steamer—many boats. And now I see only trees—a forest—or a plantation—"

"Enough, enough!" Halden called out. "Now it is my turn. I am a bit of a mind reader myself, and I don't even need to touch anything that belongs to you to tell you who you are. I see, for instance, that your name is not Vandengraaf but Alexander Blotzky. You were born on the Polish-Russian border and you ran away from home when you were fifteen. There are a few years

when I see nothing but darkness--and then I see a jail. It's a German jail and you were sentenced to four years, for forgery. During the World War you worked for the German secret service and you double-crossed them and sold them to the Allies. You saved some money and you acquired a very extensive and keen knowledge of the human character in general, which was a great aid in your later professions. In 1922 you changed your name and settled down in Holland. There is another hole in my telepathic vision, but I suppose that for a while you lived just like any average citizen. You married and you have three grown-up children. You lost your savings by some unfortunate transaction in the stock market and after that you tried one thing and another. You moved to the colonies and dabbled in various fields, until you hit on the mind-reading racket. You work it by a very efficient mixture of cleverness, shrewd appraising of men, dexterity of hand by employing an army of petty informers and by an unfailing memory for details, for names you've heard, faces you've seen and facts you've gathered one way or another. I don't mention your faculties as a linguist because that's understood and can't impress me much. I myself have some knowledge of seven languages, and, while I flatter myself that I speak at least four of them without any accent, anyone who has ears can't fail to notice that your pronunciation of the letter 'r' springs from a Galician ghetto. You are, in short, a cynic, a sceptic, a rascal, you don't believe in anything on earth or in heaven; you are one of the brightest and most amusing men I've ever met and I am pleased beyond words that fate has thrown us together as roommates."

As Vandengraaf listened to this, his face grew stupid with amazement. "I'll be damned!" he said at last, without his usual flourish. "How did you find out?"

"Vibrations, nothing but vibrations," Halden answered, laughing delightedly. This was exactly the sort of situation and joke to appeal to his peculiar sense of humour. Meanwhile Vandengraaf had composed himself. He got up and returned the passport with a bow.

"You're taking advantage of your high station, Mynheer Van Halden," he said. "After all, you are the founder and president of the S.-B.-M. Line, you practically own this ship, as you own most of the shares of the Nitarc, which means the tin mines, the rubber, the coffee of many islands. No doubt, your line is always on guard against cardsharpers, professional gamblers, pickpockets and similar rabble of my own kind. I am convinced my dossier was studied very thoroughly before I was admitted on this boat. For a man of your intelligence it must have been almost disgracefully easy to find out the lesser details of my humble life. Whereas I might be a bit proud of myself for recognizing you almost the first time we played chess together."

"Not if you had seen my picture in the papers when I won the amateur chess championship in 1928. Altogether I had quite a bit of publicity off and on, and it took no great stroke of genius to remember my face. But I must compliment you on keeping me fooled till today. I really thought that I had succeeded in guarding my silly little incognito."

You forget how much you've changed since 1928, my friend, thought Vandengraaf, but he didn't say it. Instead he asked with the lenient smile of a grown-up per-

on for a little boy playing Indians: "Is it fun to play Haroun al Raschid?"

"It has its advantages," Halden replied with a chuckle. "For example, it enabled me to share a cabin with you instead of being put up in the royal suite of some luxury liner. Besides, if I wanted to visit the islands of my youth I was compelled to take a boat of my own line, because they are the only ones to visit these out-of-the-way ports. You, being a man of imagination, won't have any trouble visualizing what endless boredom and fuss I should have inflicted upon myself by travelling officially as the head of the line. Can't you see the dreary banquets and receptions in each port, the horrid invitations to have dinner with the chief manager and the assistant manager of every bank, mine and plantation on my way—not to mention the company of their voluminous ladies and the amount of shop talk and gossip to which I would have to listen? By being a simple Mr Halden and playing the part of a timid man of modest means, I am evading all the tiresome hospitality of my own employees and of all the government officials, governors, residents and controllers of the Greater and Lesser Sunda Isles. It's well worth a little trouble and some occasional discomfort, I assure you."

Mynheer Van Halden had a few weaknesses, and enjoying his own smooth flow of words was one of them. Vandengraaf had to use all his self-control to refrain from whistling before the long-winded sentences came to an end.

"And does Anderson know who you are?" he asked abruptly.

"I am under the impression that young Anderson

hasn't even noticed my existence," Halden answered. "He is greatly absorbed in the pursuit of other things."

"You trust your daughter to guard your incognito?"

"Implicitly," said Halden and looked quizzically at the other man.

"It would be rather awkward for you if someone made public who you are," Vandengraaf said with studied thoughtfulness.

Halden shot another quick glance at him, and then he reclined again on his bunk. "Yes—rather," he said. It was at this moment that he decided to give up his innocent and comfortable incognito. "But not awkward enough to let myself be blackmailed into keeping it up," he added lazily.

Vandengraaf swallowed the hint without answering. There was a timid scraping at the door before it opened hesitatingly and admitted the cabin boy. With downcast eyes and politely folded hands he announced that the young *nonja* was on her way to bring the *tuan besar* his medicine. His broad, noiseless bare feet with their well-separated toes stuck out from under the white pants of his uniform, and he wore his batik headcloth with a characteristic swagger which told the two men that he came from Madura.

"What's the news?" Halden asked him—the usual question which opens all conversations in Malay.

With his eyes still downcast, the boy gave him a fleeting, conspiratory smile. "The Chinese man, Fong, has spoken to the coolies. He has told them about certain societies in the land of China which give the coolie the power to demand more money for his work. He has told them that one coolie is weaker than a drop of water; but

that three hundred coolies, united, shall be as strong as the flooded river in the wet monsoon."

"Yes, I too heard his speech," Mr Halden said dryly. "He sounded to me like a man who has swallowed what other men have chewed for him."

"There is some trouble brewing for tonight, mark my word," Vandengraaf remarked in English as he clutched his inevitable scrapbook under his arm and went to the door.

"Telepathy or inside information?" Halden asked him, but the mind reader left the room without any answer, and the whistled Second Entr'acte from Schubert's "Rosamund" faded away on the corridor outside. The boy slipped out behind him. Halden, left alone for a minute, took a deep breath to regulate his heartbeat which refused to be regulated. He turned towards the small round porthole for air, and the familiar swishing sound of the sea in the quickly descending dusk outside soothed his nerves which had become much too sensitive lately.

"Time for your pills, my pet," Jeff said, entering the cabin. "We'll be in port soon. Wouldn't you like to watch the landing?"

She had changed her slacks for a simple blue linen dress, and her hair was tucked under a little turban of the same material. As so often before, Halden felt a pang of regret that Jeff wasn't a little girl any longer, that he couldn't cuddle her, carry her around, take her on his lap. There was so much unused tenderness in his hands and his heart that sometimes it almost felt like a vague pain, and there was nothing he could do with it but keep it to himself. Sometimes he wondered why it was that

every woman he had known had made him suffer; even Josephine, his faultless little daughter.

"Ready to go ashore?" he asked. "Or shall we have dinner on board?"

"Dinner nothing! We're only two hours in port, and you don't think I am going to miss any of the sights," she said, switching from Dutch to English. Her mother had been an American, one of the Fullers of South Carolina, and after the divorce of her parents she had been brought up there, in Bunker Hall, her grandparents' estate. Thus English was her real language and she considered herself as American, though with a grain of Dutch stubbornness and depth in her make-up.

"What sights do you want to see?" he asked absent-mindedly after swallowing the pills which she administered to him.

"Anders told me all about it. There is an old Portuguese fort and there is an old Dutch windmill—it's one of the landmarks from the times of the Oost-Indische Compagnie—and there are cockfights, and the native market, and we might even have time to drive up into the hills — What's the matter? Aren't you feeling well?"

"Stop fussing over me, Jeff. I'm feeling fine. I was only wondering whether I shall be able to execute such an extensive programme. I may have to straighten out a few things on the plantation which seem to be a bit messed up."

"Of course, my sweetheart. You don't have to worry about me. Anders promised to show me everything. His boy is meeting him with the car and he'll drive me around. That makes it quite simple for you, doesn't it?"

"Almost too simple. It's very kind of Anderson to take

all that trouble. But I had planned to show you Sebang myself—or at least as much as I remember of it.”

Jeff scrutinized her father's face. She knew the lines of dogged determination which were hidden under his soft, white, old-man's moustache. She felt her own mouth stiffen with the same lines.

“I see,” she said.

Suddenly Halden felt sorry for himself. Ever since that fateful talk with his doctor about the condition of his heart, it had seemed to him that he felt himself getting soft, melting away like a left-over piece of ice cream on a smudged plate. He was disgusted with himself and with all the other little symptoms which announced only too clearly that he, at sixty, was an old man.

“You must understand, Jeff. Sebang is the place where I was young. It's the place where I was happy, almost the only place in the world where I was really happy. It was in Sebang that I met Theresa—did I ever tell you? She was the resident's daughter, and my company had sent me over from Tanatua to see whether we could buy land and plant rubber,” he said pleadingly.

Jeff knew the story; she had listened to it scores of times. Theresa had been her father's first wife, and she was pretty tired of her. There were albums full of faded photos: Theresa on horseback, Theresa on a veranda, Theresa in a ridiculous old-fashioned tennis outfit, Theresa as a bride, Theresa in fancy dress as a gypsy—and the ghost of Theresa in a wheel chair. There were Theresa's cooking recipes in her own handwriting and Theresa's letters and Theresa's petit-point cushions and even Theresa's long suède gloves and her fan of moth-eaten ostrich plumes. There was much too much of Theresa in

her father's life, cluttering it up and choking it with the twisted tendrils of empty memories, thought Jeff.

He had married her own mother two years after Theresa had died of some strange tropical disease and after retiring from his position in the East Indies. He had met her mother on a boat, just as she herself had met Anderson now. The marriage had been a very unhappy one, and Jeff had a suspicion that Theresa's blurred but insistent shadow had done its share in making it so. Jeff could not think of Theresa without bitterness and for good reasons. After her parents' divorce she had returned with her mother to Bunker Hall, and ever since she had alternated between the United States and The Hague, where she visited her father for three months each year. She had been torn back and forth between father and mother, both of them clamouring for her affection, both trying to bribe her into becoming a little partisan. It was not a normal or a healthy condition for the mind of a little girl and had given her much food for envious comparison with other children whose parents lived together, not only on the same continent but even in the same house. Last year, after her mother had died, quietly and gently as she had lived, Jeff had joined her father for good. He had been mourning the loss of her mother in a most perfunctory way while he kept on making a cult of Theresa's memory. No wonder that Jeff had a definite aversion towards Theresa. But this was beside the point now; it all belonged to the past. She, Jeff, was young and alive and she had to fight for her last two hours with Anders.

"I'm sorry, Father," she said. "But I'm going ashore with Anderson and I'm going to spend every minute

with him until we sail. It'll be short enough as it is."

Halden knew his daughter well enough. When she called him "Father" there was not much he could do. "You're pigheaded," he said weakly.

"So are you," she replied.

He took a deep breath to regulate his disobedient heart. "Do you care so much for him?" he asked. It sounded to him like the echo out of a never-forgotten past, like the ghosts of words he had spoken long, long ago and to his first wife.

"Don't you like him?" Jeff asked.

Halden pulled himself together. "Oh yes, oh yes. I like him," he assured her. "He is one of the most promising young men on the plantation; in fact, it is rare to be made an inspector at his age, and he will make a quick career. Indeed I like him. But that doesn't mean that I want you to associate too closely with him."

"Associate! *Mein Gott!*" she said desperately. "I shall never see him after tonight!" Her eyes were glittering, and she stuck her chin out defiantly to keep back a flood of unshed tears.

Halden felt sorry for her though he knew that he couldn't help her. He put two fingers under her chin, tilted up her face and studied it with deep concentration. She didn't flinch, but her lips began to quiver.

"Is it as bad as that?" he asked gently.

"Worse!" she answered and tried to smile. And now it was she who turned towards the porthole and looked out into the swishing, breathing, healing dusk.

"I haven't been a very selfish father so far, have I?" Halden said to her back. "I haven't demanded too

much of your time—or your—or your affection, Jeff. I've been a pretty lonely man most of my life. When we started out on this trip I had the idea that I too had a right to a little share of—of joy—or happiness—or company—or whatever you want to call it. I've been looking forward a great deal to going around with you and showing you the old places. Do you think it's fair to throw me over for the first pleasant-looking young male that's come your way? "

Halden had spoken to many meetings, across many important green tables, and he knew how to choose his words. He held his breath, watching Jeff and waiting for her answer. Her shoulders stooped a bit as if he had put a load upon them; but when she turned around, her face seemed calm and serene.

"I'm sorry, Father," she said. "I'll gladly spend every evening of my life with you—after tonight. But this is my night and I am not going to give up a single minute of it."

At that Halden seemed to shrink a bit in his white coat. He listened to steps which came down the corridor outside, soft, padding steps on the rubber soles of tennis shoes. "Blow your nose," he said hastily, handing Jeff his handkerchief. "It's Vandengraaf. I don't want him to notice that you have a cold."

"That pest!" Jeff said with conviction; and Vandengraaf knocked on the door, coughing politely like a Chinese and waiting another second before he entered.

"I hope I don't disturb you," he said, "but we are landing. I thought you might not want to miss it. It's the most picturesque port of the entire trip. You will like it, Miss Halden."

Jeff gave an inarticulate answer, threw her father a pleading glance and, without another word, left the room, banging the door behind her. Vandengraaf knelt down to pull his trunk from under his bunk and store his precious scrapbook away.

"It must have come as a shock to you when your only child fell in love with Anders Anderson's son, of all people," he said, without looking at Halden.

"Now you are hitting below the belt, my dear Blotzky," Halden replied calmly and left the cabin.

IV

THE COOLIES ON THE LOWER DECK had rolled up their mats and assembled their families. They had packed their bundles, and over their shoulders they had thrown the brightly coloured blankets which had been given them as an advance on their wages. Now they all stood densely pressed against one another, waiting for the landing. They didn't speak, they didn't laugh, even the children had grown silent, even the chickens in their bamboo crates. They stood there suspiciously sniffing the air of this new island, and their dark eyes scanned the alien shore, trying to penetrate beyond the buildings and lights of the foreign port. They were like animals testing their new grazing grounds.

Ahmet was just one among three hundred of them; he had never been a contract coolie before, never worked on a rubber plantation. While his face betrayed no emotion, his lips had blanched in his dark face and his knees

trembled with the fear of the new life. He clutched his little son Wajang to his body, and from time to time he turned around to see that his family was assembled close behind him: his two wives, his old father and his little daughter Katut who had fallen asleep after drinking all the milk from her mother's breast. Ahmct felt calmed and encouraged by the calm and courage of his father. The old man, seeing that it took the boat a long time to be manœuvered into its berth, had squatted down on the planks of the deck, had rolled his betel and put the plug into his mouth. Giving his son a quick, cunning, toothless smile, he proceeded to chew as peacefully as a buffalo chews his cud after the work in the rice fields is done. Ahmet had sold his buffaloes, and his rice fields had been taken away from him. He had failed to pay the taxes to the government; he had been warned and scolded; then the government people had placed a certain bamboo sign on the edge of his fields, and finally they had taken the *sawahs* away from him and sold them to another man. A deep sigh heaved Ahmet's chest as he remembered his buffaloes and his rice fields, all the terraced *sawahs* around the *desa* Tenga, his home village. He had become a contract coolie. He had put his thumbprint at the bottom of a document which he didn't understand but which had been explained to him several times. He had received a fortune of ten *rupias* in advance besides the really wonderful blanket and free transportation for himself and his family. As far as he knew he had signed up to work for six months on the island of Sebang in the rubber plantation of Lombok and he was to receive one full *rupia* a day and a hut to house his family. He had been told that the work on the plantation was

much easier than the work in the rice fields, and, indeed he had seen men returning from such work to the *dessa*, fat and satisfied, with the filled bellies of rich men and their belts full of money. There had been a great deal of reckoning between him, his father and some of his friends. One *rupia* a day for six months seemed to accumulate to the tremendous sum of 183 *rupia*. If his first wife kept the chickens and ducks in order and planted some vegetables, and his second wife worked on the plantation too, they could return after half a year as wealthy people, could buy the best rice fields in the community and be happy, lazy and well-filled ever after. When Ahmet had put his thumbprint to the contract his future had looked like paradise, shining in all the colours of the rainbow. It was only since he had come onto this boat that he had begun to be frightened. First of all, there had been not another man from his own *dessa*, and for a few days he had felt lost and lonesome in the crowd. It had taken him some time to discover that most of the other men came from Java too, that what they spoke was his own language even though with a different dialect, that they too knew how to plant rice, that they too believed in Allah and his prophet as well as in the countless closer and humbler gods of house and hearth, market and street, river and mountain, marriage and birth. But most of these men had forgotten their home *dessas* and the rice fields. They had become coolies, and it was their example which frightened Ahmet. They were neither fat nor wealthy and they didn't look like happy men, either. They had been shipped from one island to another for years, and they spoke of rubber as fishermen speak of the sea. There seemed to be high and low tides

and no safety at all. Sometimes there was not enough rubber, and then there was work for everybody, with high pay. Then, after a while, there was too much rubber, with no work and very small pay. The coolies were a strange, uprooted lot; they didn't seem to care for anything but the gambling boards they set up on their mats. They had smuggled some of the forbidden arrack onto the boat and handed it around in their water gourds. Ahmet, trying to make friends and learn the things he might need for his new work, had lost almost all of his ten *rupias* in gambling and had been drunk for the first time in his life. His second wife, of whom he was very fond, had scolded him and he had felt miserable for almost two days. Then his son had suffered from a fever and might have died of it, had not the Chinese man, Fong, called for the ship's doctor. The doctor had given the child some little white pills and the fever had stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Since then Ahmet had worshipped Fong. Even now, trembling with fear of the unknown future, he felt safety return to him as he listened to Fong. The Chinese, taller than any man from Java, stood in the innermost core of the crowd and told them for the last time what they should do and how they should behave on their arrival. Fong was a stranger, of a different race and creed; he spoke their language in a funny, chopped way and without any embellishment or politeness. They themselves did not know what had made him their leader and why they crowded around him and listened to every one of his words and why they were sure that he was the only one to see to their rights and their welfare.

"Friends, brothers," he said, "if you agree I will be

your spokesman with the white *tuans* as I have been the spokesman for many of you before. You have signed contracts, have signed them with the print of your thumb, but you don't know how to read what is written. I happen to know how to read and I have read your contracts. Your contracts, friends, give you money as long as you work. But they don't put the white *tuans* under any obligation to keep you working for any length of time. The *tuans* may say to you tomorrow: 'Go home coolie, I have no more work for you.' They may say next week: 'Coolie, the price of rubber has gone down, if you want to keep on working you must do it for half the wages we promised you or you can go home.' Now listen, my brothers: Today the white *tuans* need you because there will be a war in the white man's countries and they hope to sell much rubber. Therefore they need you and you have power today. If you appoint me to be your spokesman, I will tell the *tuans* that none of you will begin to work until your contracts have been changed so as to hold safely for six months. And remember, only if every single man of you refuses to work until the contracts are changed will we be successful. Can I count on all of you?"

Fong had breathed the air of revolution almost since his birth. He had grown up in Canton, under the tuition of great socialistic leaders, and even as a boy he had witnessed the first great triumph of the Little Men, when the strike of the coolies had paralyzed the harbour of Hongkong and the boats on Pearl River. He searched the passive faces around him, humble Javanese faces, and hoped that he could trust them. He hoped that he had blown enough breath of courage into their hearts to

make them stand up for their rights and their existence, at least for tonight. Javanese, he knew, were a down-trodden people; they had been under the ruthless rule of their sultans for too many centuries, and fear and humiliation were in their blood. They did not know freedom as even the poorest Chinese knew it, and they had no experience in the fight for their social rights. His glance passed over their expressionless faces, their stooped shoulders. They looked as if they had carried burdens all their lives. Suddenly a young rooster crowed into the silence which had followed Fong's words. He stretched his scrawny neck from his bamboo basket and crowed, loud and belligerently, and the crowd began to laugh.

"Even the cocks agree with me—and they know how to fight!" Fong called out. The laughter spread and swelled as it gripped even the women and the children and the sleepy old people. Ahmet's old father slapped his thighs; he had to cough and to spit out his betel with merriment over the rooster's crowing and Fong's little joke. All at once Ahmet felt light and hopeful again, and as he looked towards the foreign shore it seemed to him rich with promise and splendid with its lights and its many people who were calling and waving as if to greet him.

It was not quite dark yet; the sky had retained a greenish glow near the horizon over the open sea. Stars had arrived, and a yellow moon had raised its swollen face from the lagoon to the east, where a black frieze of palm trees was silhouetted against its light. With much yelling and commotion the *Tjaldane* was tied alongside the wharf in front of the barnlike S.-B.-M. Line building. The Dutch flag and the pennant of the line hung

limply from a mast on the roof, flapping like lazy, sleeping birds whenever the evening breeze stirred them. Sebang had electric lights and proudly exhibited them. There was a scant festoon of them along the quay and there were a few others in the background, indicating some main street of the town. A multicoloured crowd was milling around, Dutchmen in white, natives in purple sarongs and swanky, bright silk shirts, or stripped to the waist, their kris protruding behind their shoulders. There were the local Chinese merchants, dignified in black, and the ever-present vendors from India, Smyrna and Arabia, in their wide, folded pantaloons. There were the red felt or black velvet fezzes marking the Mohammedans. There were the batik headgear and tight-fitting jackets of elegant Javanese and the washed-out rags of Tamils. There were gaping fishermen in their loincloths and brown-bodied coolies who stood ready to unload the cargo. There were savage-looking Dayaks from Sumatra and there were the Dutch officials in their uncomfortable, high-collared, gold-buttoned white uniforms. There was a fascinating medley of colour, languages, voices, shouts; there was, in this lost corner of the globe, the whole Orient in a fantastic nutshell, as most of the population of Sebang had come to the wharf to welcome the *Tjaldane*.

"How do you like it?" Anders asked Jeff. She leaned at the rail between him and her father, and Anders cursed the old man silently for butting in on their last time together. It was hell to fill these precious minutes with small talk.

"It's fascinating," Jeff said impatiently. "Come, let's go ashore."

"Not yet," her father said, pointing to the gangway where a small group of Dutch officials came clambering aboard. "Passport inspection, doctor's examination, how do you call it? Red tape."

He smiled to himself as he noticed Jeff's impatience and Anders' nervousness; he had prepared a little surprise for them, and he waited for it to go off with a great swish and burst of sparks, as a little boy might wait for his fireworks to explode.

Further down the rail Dr Maverick said to Pat: "Excuse me for a moment. I'm on duty. I see my revered colleague, Dr Grader, arriving for medical inspection. Stay where you are—I'll be back in a few minutes."

Pat stayed where she was, staring at the quay, the people, the hills behind the town, the melting sky, the ridiculous moon which seemed to suffer from a bad toothache. There was nothing else she could do. Mr Anderson was immersed in a conversation with That Girl. Everybody seemed busy and extremely cheerful. If Pat hadn't known that no drinks had been sold, she would have thought they all were a bit tipsy, hilarious about nothing. Stay where you are. All right, all right, I'm staying. She would have loved to go around and slap every one of them in their silly, happy faces. Now a second group of Dutchmen arrived on deck, they surrounded Mr Anderson and there was an outburst of joyous shoulder-clapping and handshaking all around. Now he introduced his friends to That Girl and they bowed and scraped and capered for her. They felt very warm, and a few of them had sweaty moist patches where their suits stuck to their bodies. They were too

heavy from eating Dutch food and bloated with too much beer. Pat hated every one of them.

Somebody put a hand on her shoulder and patted her gently as if she were a bucking horse or something. It was Mrs Gould, the missionary's widow, her roommate.

"Want to take a ride with me?" she asked. "I think I could bargain the drivers down and get us a *carreta* for *stengah rupias*—that's fifty cents Dutch money, makes not more than one bit for each of us. What do you say? We might take a ride up into the hills and get a whiff of fresh air."

"Thanks. I have a date with the doctor," Pat said. "If he doesn't let me down, that is."

"Suit yourself, baby," said Mrs Gould. "I'm in no hurry, I'll wait awhile." She gave her another pat and a sympathetic glance and went over to look after the Austrians.

The Ritters were fat, ugly little people, and the only language they could speak was Viennese, a baby-talk version of German, crowded with diminutives and interspersed with Italian, French, Czech and Hungarian words which had crept into the lingo of the Austrian capital during the rule of the Austrian Empire over people of those nationalities. Mrs. Gould had taken the Austrians to her big heart because they were so lonely, so helpless and so disliked on the boat. Their plight was heartbreaking but absurd. Herr Ritter, it appeared, had belonged to the wrong political party, and when Austria became a part of Hitler Germany they had escaped in the nick of time. Since then the Ritters had been people without a country, without a passport and, legally, they had ceased to exist. Without a passport they could not

stay in any country nor were they allowed to land in any port. They could not cross borders and they could not settle down. All they could do was to keep on traveling, using up their small savings on cheap little boats, trying to bribe their way into some refuge and bracing each other up by telling fantastic stories about other homeless refugees. It was very easy to be sorry for the Ritters, but very difficult to like them. For the Ritters remained in splendid isolation and refused to acquire any words or thoughts or manners which were not Austrian. Their eternal pride in Things Viennese drove anyone to despair who tried to talk to them, and they remained seated on an invisible throne and looking down with contempt on anything that didn't hail from Vienna.

The Ritters were all dressed up to go ashore, as they had been in every port; and in every port the authorities had refused them landing cards and kept them prisoners in this boat which they hated.

"Well, are you all raring and ready to go?" Mrs Gould asked, shouting at them as if they were deaf. Frau Ritter smiled sadly and Herr Ritter bowed from the waist and kissed Mrs Gould's rough, work-worn hand. "Ve vill ask de captain," he said, exhausting his scant vocabulary. Mrs Gould patted his shoulders, too. She had learned that this soothed animals and human beings alike where other means of communication failed. "It's a shame I don't know German," she said good-naturally. "You see, in Utah they teach you Japanese and Chinese and every heathen's language, but I must have ditched the German classes."

"Ve vill ask de captain," Herr Ritter repeated, uncomprehending, and Mrs Gould shouted that she

oped they would be permitted to go ashore this me.

Captain Brookhuis, mopping his brow and looking most uncomfortable, had come on deck to welcome the port officials. It was his responsibility to guard Mynheer van Halden's incognito, and the frail owner of the S.-I.-M. Linc seemed to him as big and conspicuous as a white elephant. Shaking hands with everybody, he shoturtive glances at his highest chief, who seemed utterly amused by his captain's embarrassment.

Anders Anderson remembered Pat Houston only when he discovered her leaning next to him at the rail, almost touching his elbow. In spite of this proximity she looked like a little island lost in a sea of loneliness. She smiled at him, flashing all her teeth as she had been taught to smile through a thousand weary, shoddy floor shows.

"Excuse me!" Anders told Jeff Halden. "I have to say good-bye to Miss Houston."

Jeff knew that he had travelled on the same boat with Miss Houston from Port Said to Singapore, but Anders had omitted several details—for instance, the fact that he had paid her passage, that she had pursued him onto the *Tjaldane*, and in what place he had made her acquaintance. Thus Jeff had been not more jealous of Pat than any normal attractive young woman is of any other attractive young woman. "Don't be long," she muttered, slightly annoyed that he should give up even a single one of their precious last minutes.

"Hello, Pat," Anders said.

"Hello, Mr Anderson," said Pat.

"How do you like the place?" he asked her, groping for words. Since he had met Jeff he had lost all contact

with Pat. In fact, he could not understand how in the world he could ever have been interested enough in the girl to burden himself with her company.

"It looks different from what you've told me," Pat said; she tried in vain to synchronize the vivid, colourful, swirling life at the wharf with the pictures of torrid, brooding, deserted weariness which she had conjured from Anders' descriptions of his existence on the plantation.

"I want to say good-bye to you, Pooch," Anders said holding out his hand and coming down from his height so that she suddenly found his eyes close before her face. His right eye was a bit smaller than the left, which gave him a permanent air of winking. "It's been awfully nice to have known you. I hope you'll get home safely and you'll find your family well."

"Thank you, Mr Anderson. That's very kind of you."

"In Manila you take the *President Lincoln*. I've made your reservation, and Maverick promised me to install you comfortably and see you off. He knows the chief purser. The *Lincoln* is a good boat—you'll like her."

"I'm sure I shall."

"Is there anything else I can do for you? I mean—maybe you need a little money or something?"

"Oh no, thanks."

"You'd tell me frankly if you needed something, Pooch, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, Mr Anderson, I'd tell you. But I'm quite okay."

"Well, then, good-bye, Pooch. Take good care of yourself. Be a good girl—and take it easy with the liquor. I talked to Dr Maverick about it. And write me a line when you get back home, so I won't have to worry that you got lost on the way."

"Don't you worry. You'd better take care of yourself in your jungles. They tell me there is a lot of malaria around—"

"I never catch it. The mosquitoes don't like me."

"And remember what Colonel Lambton said about never forgetting, in the tropics, to wear a flannel wrapper around your tummy at night."

The corners of her mouth ached from all the smiling, and now, to make things worse, she felt that they had begun to quiver. Damn it! Pat thought. There were more people on deck than she had ever seen before on the *Tjaldane*, and every one of them seemed to watch her taking farewell from the only love of her hectic life. She held up her smarting, quivering smile for yet another second, like an acrobat balancing a three-hundred-pound weight, before it all came crashing down.

"Glad to've met you," she tried to say, and then she threw her arms around Anderson's neck and found herself kissing him to her heart's content.

Jeff couldn't help noticing the little scene from her vantage point further down the rail, and she blushed bitterly as she tactfully turned her face away. But on her other side she encountered her father, smiling at her, not without malice.

"Captain Brookhuis has ordered a car for us," he said amiably. "As soon as the formalities are over we can sneak away for our little trip."

Jeff looked at her father as if she found it difficult to recognize him. "You know that I am not going to drive around with you, Father," she said. "Sorry to disappoint you."

"I thought you might have changed your mind," he said.

"No, I have not. And why should I?"

"If not out of jealousy, then out of consideration—for me as well as for Anderson. Did it never occur to you that someone like this Houston girl would be a much better match for him than you are yourself? If you offer a planter the choice between rum and lemonade, what will he take? Anderson is a realist; planting rubber makes realists of men—and you are only lemonade, my little *meisje*. Probably it would be much better for him to spend the last evening before his return to the plantation in a quick, exciting, complete adventure with Miss Houston than in looking at the moon with you and quoting Wordsworth or his Danish *Neils Lyhne*."

"I don't like you when you are mean, my pet," Jeff said quietly but with blazing eyes.

"I'm not mean. I'm only trying to save you from growing pains, from the disappointments, the disillusionment—"

Sometimes Jeff hated her father. Sometimes she could understand why her mother had divorced him on the grounds of mental cruelty.

"I'm not a shareholders' meeting. You can spare your orator's tricks with me," she said vehemently and stopped in the middle of the sentence; her annoyance evaporated and gave way to a surge of pity. He's a sick man, and the doctor told me not to aggravate him, she thought, full of self-reproach. She slipped her arm into his and dragged him away from the rail. Pat Houston was still hanging onto Anders' neck, Jeff saw it from the corner of her eye as she left the scene of the unpleasant spectacle.

At the door of the salon the passengers crowded

around Captain Brookhuis in great commotion. Exclamations of surprise and pleasure rose from the tightly packed group, drowning his staccato voice.

"What is going on over there?" Jeff asked her father as he piloted her gently towards the salon.

"Oh, nothing," he said and tried to appear absent-minded. "Brookhuis is only making a little announcement. A small change of the schedule, you know. The boat will remain in port until tomorrow morning, and we shall have a little feast on board. It will be quite an event for the populace—don't you think so? I believe it is eight years since a boat ever remained longer than a few hours."

Jeff pinched her father's arm in an explosion of gratitude and excitement. "Father!" she said, "My pet—my silly, old sweetheart! *You* gave the order—because you know how much a few more hours mean to me."

Halden pretended not to listen to her, but she knew the way his soft white moustache flicked when he tried to hide a chuckle beneath it, almost like the tail of a cat on the roof in pursuit of some mischief.

"... while we are loading our cargo I suggest you all take a look at the town, it's quite an interesting place. At eleven o'clock we expect our passengers back as guests for our party, and we want you to bring your best mood along. Now, if you will, please, step over to the *hofmeester*, who will hand you your landing cards," the captain finished his speech.

"Or did you want me to be ashamed of myself?" Jeff concluded, pulling her father's arm impatiently.

"No, *meisje*. It's simply an old man's compromise. I thought if I gave you a whole long tropical night as a

present you might consider letting me have one hour of it," he said.

"You are—" Jeff began, but she closed her mouth as Anders stepped up to them. He had disentangled himself from Pat's desperate embrace and, with even more difficulty, from the noisy little group of planters, their exuberant greetings, their not too delicate jokes and their invitation to have a welcoming drink with them at the club. They were his friends and he was fond of them, he belonged to them and he was tied to them by the strong ties of mutual work and strife. But now he came straight back to Jeff with the unerring instinct of a male moth in pursuit of his mate. There were, by the way, thousands of such moths whirring around the electric lamps on the quay and on deck.

"Jeff, did you hear it? We have still a whole night before us! It's like the things that happen in Andersen's fairy tales. I've spotted my boy with the car down at the pier, so if you are ready we could go at once—"

He stopped as he noticed the exchange of glances between Jeff and her father. He always forgot that the timid little old gentleman existed, and it never occurred to him that he might put any obstacles in his way.

"I hope, Mr Halden, you don't mind if I take Jeff around in my car," he added perfunctorily.

"I've just tried to date up the young lady myself," Halden said hesitantly. "But I realize that you have first call on her, and I want to see a few old friends anyway. I propose we meet at nine o'clock—would that suit you? Shall we say at the Portuguese fort, near the old cannon? I remember it as a charming spot which generations of young planters thought most suitable for romantic meet-

ings. Agreed? Well then, au revoir—or, as they say here, *Slamat djalan.*”

It was the first time that Anders had heard such a long and coherent speech from the old man, and his face looked silly with surprise. It was the effect Halden had hoped for, and he returned Anderson’s gasp with a benevolent smile. Jeff looked from one to the other and burst into laughter: it was as good as watching a fine comedy from the front row.

“*Slamat—Slamat tinggal,*” Anders replied automatically. Jeff grabbed his arm and took him away. “I didn’t know your father understood Malay. How is it he knows the place so well? Has he been in the Indies before?” Halden heard him ask in an excited, penetrating whisper as they disappeared towards the gangway. He looked after them, smiling, although he pressed a hand to his heart in an aimless gesture which had become a habit with him. Midway on the precariously bouncing gangway Jeff turned around, left Anderson and hurried back to her father.

“Thank you—thank you so much,” she whispered, and to Halden’s amazement he felt the touch of a kiss, light as the wing of a butterfly, on his cheek. Caresses were rare between them, and he received this one with great reverence.

“What are you going to do while we are gone?” she asked him.

“You are too curious,” he said.

“It must be hereditary,” she answered and was gone.

Halden’s eyes followed the two tall young people down the gangway and through the crowd; now they walked along the native stalls with their wares of junk

displayed in the harsh light of little acetylene lamps. Now they were greeted native fashion by a boy in white pyjamas. One second Jeff's blue turban was still bobbing up in the crowd, and the next she had disappeared into the narrow lane which—Halden remembered with a rush of wistful memories—led to the harbour of the native crafts.

"A swell guy," somebody said next to him.

"What? Who?" Halden asked Vandengraaf who had popped up at his side out of nowhere.

"Miss Pat Houston just informed me that Anders Anderson is a swell guy," the mind reader remarked. "You may not agree with her, but I do."

Halden did not think this worth an answer. "What is the matter down below?" he asked instead. "Why don't they take off the coolies?"

"I am most flattered that you turn to me for information," Vandengraaf said with an ironical bow. "The fact is that the lorries from the plantation met with some delay. You seem to have forgotten the thinner blood, the lower blood pressure and the consequently slower tempo of the tropics. *Pan, pan*—easy, easy, is their motto. The lorries will arrive if the gods want it thus. Meanwhile Dr Grader can attend in leisure to the medical inspection."

Dr Maverick had lined up the coolies on the lower deck and paraded them past Dr Grader, who represented the government. He gave each of them a perfunctory examination, touching their pulses and looking into the retinas of their eyes for signs of disease or fever, and let them pass. Two Dutch assistants had arrived from Lombok to take over the coolies, but they evaded the aura of mixed smells which rose from those frightened

people, from their sweating bodies, their bundles and mats, their baskets of food and their cages with chickens. The Dutch assistants had settled down on the upper deck with a few bottles of beer while four Chinese *mandoers* or foremen, whom they had brought along, organized the evacuation of the boat. There had been a short exchange of Chinese between Fong and the *mandoers*, incomprehensible to anyone else, and now the coolies were driven from the *Tjaldane* with shouts and commands, while those who remained on the boat for other ports and other plantations watched their exodus with the vacant gaze of animals.

"Shall we have some beer at the club?" Dr Grader said to Maverick as he washed his hands in the doctor's stateroom.

"I'm not Dutch. Beer drinking is one of the few vices to which I am not addicted," Maverick answered. "But I remember your Holland gin with pleasure."

"Then we might go directly to my bungalow. There are still a few bottles left," Grader said. He was a lean, tired and intelligent-looking fellow, and his fine skull, his narrow, long hands with the lighter nails betrayed some Javanese blood in his ancestry. There was no definite colour line in the Netherlands Indies with their high percentage of intermarriage, but men like Dr Grader were apt to be extremely sensitive and a bit snobbish on questions of race.

"How is Bobo?" Maverick asked him, holding a towel out to him.

"Dead. Sacrificed on the altar of science."

"Oh! Too much Prontosyl?"

"I doubt it. Too many T.A. bacteria," said Dr Grader.

Bobo had been one of several little monkeys on whom he experimented in some research in epidemics of a special brand of typhoid fever.

"All right, let's go," Dr Maverick said. Only when they were walking down the empty corridor did he remember Pat, and he stopped. "By the way," he said, slightly embarrassed, "would you mind if I brought a girl along?"

"A girl? Yes, I would mind—definitely," Dr Grader replied. "Man alive, I am starved for sensible conversation and some good, juicy shop talk, and you can't talk sensibly with a girl around."

"Pat is a good sort; she can drink like a Russian sailor. You'll forget she is a girl."

Grader contemplated this for a moment, but then he shook his head. "If you lived in this blasted place you wouldn't think a man could forget that a girl is a girl. No, thanks, she would disturb us no end. And I have some very nice cultures of anthrax ready for you."

Dr Maverick made no further efforts to press Pat's presence on his colleague. He knew how eagerly Dr Grader waited for the day the *Tjaldane* put into port. He was starved for a bit of shop talk and he had always some bacterial display ready which he exhibited with boyish exuberance. To tell the truth, Dr Maverick himself was just as anxious not to miss this regular scientific two-man congress as was the local doctor. Grader's primitive lab with its microscope, its culture of tropical bacteria and parasites, its quiet pondering over unsolved medical problems, was an important haven in Dr Maverick's anchorless life.

"All right, let's go," he said contentedly.

Pat stood at the rail and saw them walk down the gangway. The boat was almost empty by now; all the passengers were gone, except Herr and Frau Ritter, who had remained in their deck chairs, at odds with the whole world but consoled by each other's presence. Mrs Gould, complete with straw hat and cotton gloves, stopped next to Pat.

"I feel like a forgotten umbrella," Pat said without looking at her.

"How does a forgotten umbrella feel?" Mrs Gould asked.

"Useless. I wish I were home."

"Now, baby, don't you start getting sorry for yourself. I've waited for you. Let's take a *carreta* and have a good time. This boat party tonight is going to be something, let me tell you that," Mrs Gould said cheerfully. To be cheerful was her profession and the sole content of her life. She had buried her husband and lost four children in the outposts where she had spent her time, she had been through Chinese famines and Indian floods, through the civil wars and epidemics of the Orient, she had been ill with cholera, had been shot in the arm, her home had been burned and her flower pots destroyed. But with the help of the Lord and the Bible and her own robust nature she had managed to remain cheerful through it all.

"There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance," she quoted from the Bible.

"Okay with me," Pat answered, as she followed Mrs Gould down the gangway.

The last passenger to leave the boat was Mynheer Van Halden. Being the anonymous host of the evening, he had given a few additional orders to Captain Brookhuis

and the fat *hofmeester*, had told the cabin boy to lay out his new white dinner jacket, had taken his medicine and made himself ready to go ashore. At the last minute he had not felt well and had lain on his bunk once more, staring at the march of ants across the ceiling and waiting for his rebellious heart to calm down.

When he finally left, he passed the Ritters in their deck chairs. They looked so lost and forlorn that he felt sorry for them.

"Don't you want to go ashore?" he asked them in their own language. Up to now he had never disclosed the fact that he knew German, because he did not want to be troubled by their endless jeremiads. But he had not expected that his simple question would release such a flood of words, a breaking of dams and dikes, a cataclysm of pent-up conversational powers. No, the Ritters could not go ashore, they were not allowed to, oh no! They had not received a landing card, not even in this godforsaken corner of the world were they permitted to set foot on land. In vain Halden tried to stem the outburst. Only when he took two landing cards from his pocket and waved them in front of the Ritters did they stop—abruptly.

"Forgive me," he said. "It's all my fault. The captain asked me to give you these cards—with the best compliments of the S.-B.-M. Line—and I almost forgot. I am an old man with a very weak memory, you understand. Will you forgive me? I wish you a most enjoyable trip ashore."

He turned and left the Ritters overwhelmed, chattering like monkeys over an unknown fruit. As he went down the gangway, he felt like whistling, although he

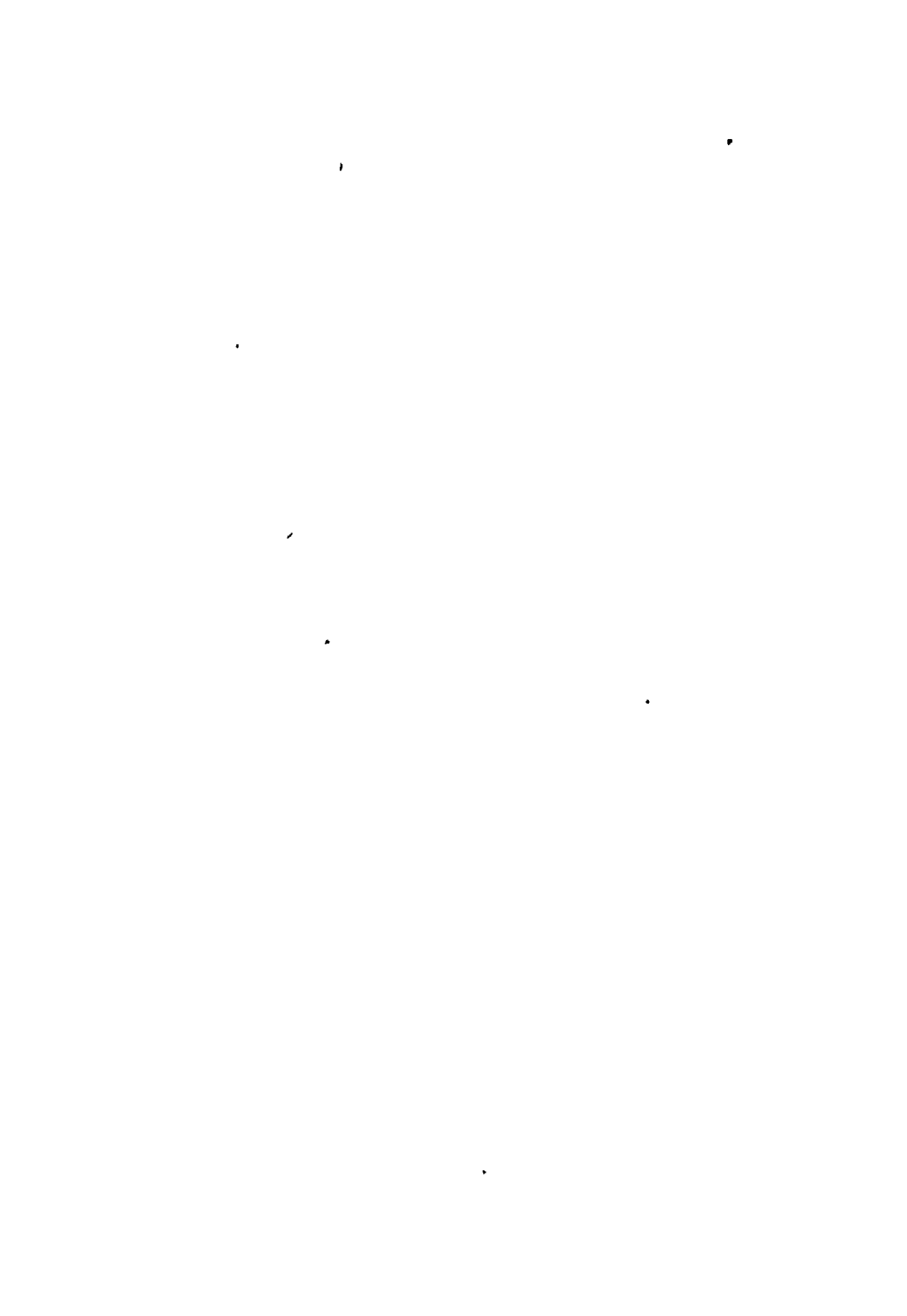
was no virtuoso of Vandergraaf's calibre. On the quay he stood for a while with a lost smile on his wrinkled face. His ears drank in the familiar shouts and noises, his lungs filled themselves with the air of the island as he inhaled once more the scent of rubber sheets wrapped in matting, the scent of spice and of perfumed native cigarettes, and the strong fragrancy of Tjempaka flowers in the vendors' baskets and in the women's hair. He found the big car with the pennant of the line waiting for him and he asked the barefooted chauffeur: "My friend, where can I find the *tuan* Foster at this hour?"

"The *tuan besar* is at the club, *Tuan*," the chauffeur informed him without hesitation, for on the islands the white man cannot move without having the attention of the entire native population focussed on himself.

"Will my friend kindly take me to the *tuan besar* Foster?" Halden said in polite Malay. "I wish to speak to him."



The Shore



ANN FOSTER CAME OUT onto the gallery of the bungalow to see if the boy had forgotten to fill the kerosene lamp which hung there under its orange-coloured silk shade. He had forgotten to fill it. He forgot to fill it every evening.

"Madeh! The lamp!" she called plaintively.

"*Sudah, Nonja, sudah!*" came the answer from the servants' house in the back of the garden. Ann remained apathetically on the gallery, waiting for the boy; absent-mindedly she scratched the mosquito bites on her arms. General Alten Street consisted of a double line of exactly identical bungalows. Ever since the time of the Oost-Indische Compagnie the houses of the white man had been built like that; the imagination of the native

craftsmen was unable to conceive any variation. Each bungalow had the same porch, called the *Binnengalerie*. Each one was painted the same sickly yellow. On each gallery the same imitation Delft plates were hanging right and left of the door which led into the house, and the same orange silk shaded the same kerosene lamp. There were electric lights in Sebang, but the line didn't extend to this end of General Alten Street, and the struggle to keep the kerosene lamps filled and burning was the same in each bungalow.

Ann stopped scratching. It only made things worse, and what had merely been an itch had now developed into a burning, stinging pain all around her wrists.

"Madch! The lamp!"

"*Sudah, Nonja, sudah!*"

Insects of every description hung in a rotating cloud around the flickering light under the orange shade. The mosquitoes were a dancing, whirring mist of thin, hungry bodies. They were a constant, almost unbearable torture to Ann. It seemed as if every single mosquito in the vicinity would descend upon her to leave her with an itching, burning, irritating, swelling and infected bite. In vain had she tried every known remedy. She had eaten layers of dead mosquitoes on her toast, an unsavoury prescription which was said to immunize the blood. At Dr Grader's advice she had received numerous shots of Salvarsan into her veins; she had even followed the counsel of her *babu* and secretly visited the native witch doctor, had inhaled some terrible fumes and swallowed the foul concoction he had brewed for her—all to no avail. She was sentenced to go through life smelling of citronella and ammonia, covered with mos-

quito bites, scratching herself half mad, and suffering from a new attack of malaria every few weeks. She had resigned herself to this as she had resigned herself to so many smaller and bigger annoyances. The tropics had worn her out, made her too tired for anything but resignation. Sometimes Ann could almost understand the passive indolence of the natives.

"Madeh! The lamp!"

She might have remained in the *klamboe* room, but it was too hot and sticky inside. The *klamboe* room was a smaller, screened-off room inside the bedroom, a refuge from the everlasting menace of mosquitoes and malaria. Her bed and her husband's stood there, the baby slept there, and sometimes she sat there reading or writing letters. But soon she felt stifled by the damp heat inside and returned to the gallery.

"Madeh! The lamp!"

Madeh came floating through the garden, carrying a newly filled lamp in his long, thin fingers. Ann watched him absent-mindedly as he changed the lamps and set the match to the *obat njamoek*, the snake-like, greenish coil on the table, whose fumes were supposed to drive off the mosquitoes but never did. The sharp yet sweetish smoke irritated her throat and made her cough. Two geckos, big lizards with reddish eyes, were clinging to the ceiling, sleepily watching for insects. One of them cleared its throat and, with the voice of a hoarse old opera baritone, called seven times. It meant bad luck. The superstitions of the islands had crept into Ann's mind without her noticing it. Suddenly the whole weariness and monotony of Sebang overcame her and she let herself drop into the next chair and closed her eyes.

Pictures of Holland crowded each other inside her closed eyelids. The cold, grey beach of Scheveningen in November. The quiet canals and *grachten* of Amsterdam with the trees bending over them as if to look at their own still reflection in the water. Skaters on the big pond in The Hague. A carpet of yellow tulips on the flower fields of Harlem. Snow on the spire of an old church, soft, cold wonderful snow. It all dissolved and there remained at last nothing but a little basket with strawberries, floating down the canal and disappearing under a bridge—as clear and distinct to her closed, remembering eyes as she had seen it when she had been a little girl clutching her father's hand.

The sound of her husband's motor car stopping in front of the garden gate startled her out of her visions. She had not expected him home so soon. He came hurriedly through the small front garden and up the steps to the gallery, roaring for Madch and passing her without a greeting. His face was clouded, annoyed and worried as he stamped into the house. Ann followed him, anxiously listening to his short, heavy breathing.

Jan Foster was a heavy-footed, thick-set, thick-skinned and full-blooded man. He lived noisily and without any consideration at the side of his demure and ever-tired wife. He hated General Alten Street and, until the time of his marriage, had lived on Lombok plantation, whose chief manager he was. It was only after he had returned from home leave, a married man, and brought Ann along as his wife, that he had grumbly conformed to the unwritten rules of the company, which considered women an unwanted disturbance on the plantation, and had settled down in

Sebang. He was a tireless drinker, a greedy eater, a tempestuous lover, a vivacious snorer and a ruthless worker on the plantation. The coolies called him by the name of the Great Volcano, Batara Guru.

Jan's presence hit the bungalow like a minor earthquake. The walls creaked, the furniture began to shake, the china rattled, the servants trembled. Foster's outbursts were feared alike on General Alten Street and on the plantation estate of Lombok. Dr Grader had warned him several times of the condition of his heart, muttering something about high blood pressure being so much more dangerous in this climate. Jan always looked as if everything were too tight for him, as if he were ready to burst out of his clothes, his shoes, his collars, even out of the shiny, tight, pink skin of his face.

"Madeh! Ann! *Babu!*" he roared. "I am in a hurry. I want a bath. Fresh underwear. Coffee, strong coffee, no dishwater!"

Ann hoped to God that the water boy had not forgotten to replenish the small tank in the bathroom. Taking a bath in Sebang consisted of dipping water from the tank and sluicing yourself with it. Jan banged the frail bamboo door open, tore off his damp clothes and flung them to the floor. The *babu* came scurrying in with a pile of fresh towels, and there were quick steps of bare feet on the gravel of the garden path and a commotion of voices back there by the kitchen. With Jan Foster around, even the natives produced some show of speed.

"May I help you?" Ann called into the bathroom, but as there was only a grunt and a big splash of water as a reply, she closed the bamboo door and withdrew as noiselessly as possible. The baby in his cot under a sepa-

rate little mosquito net had begun to whimper. She went over and dried the perspiring, sleepy little face; he put four fingers of his left hand into his mouth as was his habit, sighed deeply and went back to sleep. Ann also gave a sigh as she looked down at little Jan. The silver ringlets of his hair were damp with perspiration, and he had the white, transparent skin which most Dutch children acquire in the Indies. The *babu* had made him a tiny Dutch Wife, a bamboo roll covered with linen, to take in his arms while he slept and permit the air to circulate around his body. With his miniature Dutch Wife little Jan had cuddled up as children at home do with their Teddy bears.

"*Babu*," Ann whispered as she left the cot, "doesn't the little master look pale?"

The *babu* tucked the mosquito net tightly around the cot and squatted down on her haunches next to it. She wore a neat black sarong and a white jacket. Her hair of black lacquer was tied into a small bun at the nape of her neck, and she had the face of a wise, sad old monkey.

"No, *Nonja*," she whispered. "The little master is well and contented."

Madeh appeared with the coffee just in time, as Jan Foster, clad in his pyjama pants only, returned from the bathroom. He seemed refreshed but in no better mood than before. Madeh poured the coffee, and the *babu*, after one glance at the master's clouded face, crept from the *klamboe* room. He gulped the first cup of coffee as hot as he could stand it, shaking his head like a buffalo annoyed by flies.

"Don't you feel well?" Ann asked him.

He did not consider this worth any answer. "*Djongos!*"

he roared instead. "Where are my shoes? The new ones, you slow, stupid turtles!"

There was a scuffle of feet outside, then the thin-boned hand of the water boy appeared in the chink of the door, put down a pair of white shoes and withdrew in fear. Ann had sized up the symptoms of her husband's bad mood and come to a conclusion.

"Did you play poker at the club?" she asked, pouring him another cup of coffee.

"No, we played kissing games," he answered rudely.

"Did you lose?"

"Did I lose at poker? No, I didn't. You can drive a man crazy with your silly questions," he shouted as he asthmatically bent down to pull on the fresh socks which Ann handed him. While she stared abstractedly at his thick red neck and listened to his heavy breathing, she wondered, as so often before, why she had married him. But then, Jan Foster on home leave in Amsterdam was quite a different man from Jan Foster, the planter in Lombok. She had admired his strength and had been impressed by his inarticulate courtship. He had seemed something very glamorous to her: an Indier, as a planter was called at home. She had easily given up her dreary job as a stenographer, dreaming of a splendid, exotic life, a house under palms, starlit nights under the Southern Cross. Her dreams, in most part inspired by the travel folders of the S.-B.-M. Line, had shrunk and died like everything else that was transplanted from Holland to the tropics. In her homesickness Ann had sent for Dutch seeds and plants, to raise tulips, carnations and tomatoes. They had become smaller and smaller under the ruthless sun till they had shrunk to nothing. Here the

chickens were tiny and laid no eggs and the cows gave no milk. All that had remained in her powerless hands after six years of marriage was two little graves in the small cemetery and a pale baby under the mosquito net.

Jan's face was purplish as he straightened up after putting on his socks, and he leaned back in his chair to catch his breath. "Give me my shirt," he said. "And don't stare at me like an idiot."

Ann's thoughts had taken a detour. "Do you think the *Tjaldane* has brought any apples?" she asked, handing him his shirt.

"Apples?"

"Yes, fresh apples. She brought some last time. They were a bit shrivelled, but they tasted wonderful."

As she said this, Ann's throat grew tight with the yearning for fresh apples—cool, juicy apples with a brisk tang and without the sickening, perfumed sweetness of native papayas, mangosteens and salaks. . . .

Foster pulled the shirt over his head. "No, the *Tjaldane* didn't bring apples. She brought another lovely surprise, though. A lovely, lovely surprise which may cost me my neck," he said in a muffled voice. "D'you know who arrived on the *Tjaldane*? The Old Man!"

"Who?" Ann asked, dumbfounded.

"Who? The boss! The almighty Mynheer Van Halden—the sneaking, poisonous, bloody nuisance! Mynheer Van Halden incognito. Came to the club to see me. Wants to know what we are doing in Lombok, wants to snoop into our business. Don't stare at me like an idiot! You know him, don't you? He is the meanest, most venomous creature on earth, and he'll make all the trouble he is capable of," Jan Foster exploded.

"Mynheer Van Halden? What is he doing here?" Ann asked, completely dazed. She knew Halden as well as a stenographer in the S.-B.-M. office in Amsterdam might know the president of the line. She had seen him once or twice before her engagement, had been congratulated by him afterwards, and she remembered having met Jan Foster for the first time under Mynheer Van Halden's photo which hung in the waiting room of the Nitarc Building.

"Don't stand and stare at me, don't ask stupid questions," Jan shouted at her. "Give me my shoes, I'm in a hurry. I have to drive out to the Estate and talk to the assistants and inspectors. Somebody seems to have complained about me. If I find out who, I'll break his neck. Irregularities—I'll show them irregularities! Writing letters to the home office, putting the Old Man on my track! Irregularities!"

"Are there—irregularities? Is there—I mean—you didn't do anything incorrect, Jan?"

For a second it seemed as if Foster would have a stroke. He raised his hand and came up to Ann, who stepped back to the wall, shielding her face, fearful lest he should beat her. He had beaten her before. He had even beaten the baby. When Jan Foster became furious he didn't know what he was doing. He smashed plates and broke the furniture. He got into fights at the club. He lashed the contract coolies and then there was trouble on the plantation.

"No—no—please—don't!" Ann whispered. The rush of blood in his face ebbed away and left him pale, panting for breath.

"Keep your mouth shut," he said. "The Old Man

doesn't want people to know that he is in town, the crazy old crank! You should hear the stories the old-timers have to tell about him! He is a mean devil."

He tried to bend down and tie his shoelaces, but a new rush of blood made him dizzy and he straightened up with a curse.

"Come on! Aren't you of any use? Tie my shoelaces," he yelled at Ann. She knelt down to do it. "Hurry up!" he said, giving her a slight kick with his foot. Ann changed her mind and got up again. Her face was as white as his new shoes.

"Call the boy," she said. "I am not your *njai*."

Before his marriage Jan Foster had kept a native housekeeper, like most of the men on the plantation. Her name was Sitah, and the Dutch ladies of Sebang had taken pleasure in pointing her out to Ann: a slick, frail, flower-like creature with an immobile face, hibiscus blossoms in her hair, her tight-fitting silk jacket buttoned with golden sovereigns. After Jan Foster had brought Ann along and settled down in decorous General Alten Street, Sitah had been turned over to Dr Grader. When Ann's second baby died, the *babu* had uttered some dark remarks about Sitah having practised *goona-goona* on the little master. Ann had forbidden her to talk such nonsense, but some bitter, superstitious dregs had remained in the subconscious regions of her mind.

"That's the trouble with you—that you are not a *njai*," Jan said with menacing calm. "You're useless, you're a burden, you drive me crazy with your moods and your eternal hankering for Holland. If you were a *njai* you would cheer me up when I am worried, you would dry my sweat when I am tired, you would be restful and

content instead of acting like a martyr and asking for a divorce every second week."

The shrill and insistent ringing of the telephone in the next room interrupted him. There were not many telephones in Sebang, and to have one was a definite sign of social importance.

"That will be Lombok," Jan said, limping with one shoe from the *klamboe* room. "There was some fuss with the fired coolies . . ."

But before he reached the door, Madeh bowed himself in with the announcement that the *nonja* resident wanted to talk with the *nonja besar*. The resident's wife, an obese, middle-aged lady, ruled the small Dutch society with a firm hand, and a call from her was almost a command. Ann went out mechanically and took the receiver to listen with ever-growing surprise and amazement to the excited voice over the telephone.

When she returned a few minutes later to the *klamboe* room, Jan was all dressed, his shoes laced, his coat buttoned, his hair slicked back, and he was just putting his gun into his hip pocket.

"Well, what did the *nonja* resident have to tell you?" he asked pleasantly. Every trace of his fury seemed to have evaporated, and Ann detected even a smile under his yellow moustache. She took a deep breath, almost exploding with the great news.

"Oh, Jan, why didn't you tell me that we are invited on the *Tjaldane*—or didn't you know about it? There is a big party, everybody is going, the *Tjaldane* is staying in port until tomorrow, isn't that wonderful? It sounds like the most wonderful thing that has happened to me since I came here. It is—it is—as if the great world had

come into our corner to visit us. Lord, I'm so excited, I don't know what I'm saying—and— Good gracious, what am I going to wear? The green brocade is five years old and as tight as a skin, and I've seen in the magazines that wide skirts are in fashion now. It is horrible what happens to us women here—and my hair—I'm looking a fright. You men are lucky, you just put on a dinner jacket—"

Jan's smile had changed into a sneer. "Save your breath," he said. "We are not going to that party."

"We are—not going?" Ann said in a small voice, "We are not going? That's not possible. You can't mean that. Why, it's the only time anything has happened in Sebang—the only time, Jan—and why not?"

"Because I don't want to."

"But Jan—"

"All right: because I have no time to go gallivanting around tonight. I have to be on the Estate—there is trouble ahead—it seems they can't get things organized without me. I can't afford to have a coolie riot just when the Old Man is around."

Jan Foster walked heavily to the small baby cot and lifted little Jan from it. He had no more consideration for other people's sleep or fatigue than if they were inanimate objects. Little Jan blinked sleepily at his father and groped for the most impressive thing within his ken, the yellow moustache.

"*Apa Apa*," he said, using all of his six new teeth in creating those wonderful consonants which he had discovered only recently. His vocabulary consisted of nine words so far, four Dutch and five Malay.

"How are you, Governor?" Jan said gently. He blew

into the baby's neck and looked from the little fellow to Ann. "Isn't the Governor a bit warmish?" he asked. "He won't get a fever, will he?"

"Mama, Papa, Baby," said little Jan, making the most of his linguistic accomplishments. Ann came over and touched the damp little forehead, the neck and the mosquito-bitten, tiny paws.

"No, he is fine," she said, taking him from his father's arm and putting him back into the cot. Up went the four fingers of little Jan's left hand and into his mouth. "Good night, Governor," Jan said, tucking the mosquito net in and peeping through it for another second. "There's a good little boy!"

Ann almost wished little Jan would make a rumpus when he was put to bed as the babies at home did—strong, healthy, aggressive babies; but she forgot this over the more important issue of the party.

"If you can't go to the party why can't I go without you?" she said, rushing out onto the gallery after her departing husband. "There is no reason why I should stay home alone. Why should I be the only woman in all Sebang to be left out—"

"I don't want you to go without me. Stop bickering."

"I could go with the *nonja* resident, I am sure she would take me along. I want to go and I am going." Impulsively she had held out her hands in a pleading gesture.

Jan took her hands and squeezed them till they ached. "Listen to me," he said. "I'm having enough trouble as it is. I don't want to have you there, babbling nonsense to the Old Man and messing up my affairs. You will stay at home—and that's that. You can go to sleep, you

don't have to wait for me, I may have to stay on the plantation overnight."

"You can't treat me like this. I am not your prisoner," Ann cried as her husband flung off her hands and went down the steps towards the front garden. He turned abruptly and came back once more, shaking his fists right under her face.

"You do what you are told, or you'll be very sorry!" he yelled at her. Suddenly Ann's body slackened and her hands dropped to her sides in a gesture of resignation. Every impulse of resistance leaked out of her, as if the very core of her being were punctured. Jan Foster called for the chauffeur, his heavy steps jarred down the gravelled path, and the car was started. Ann remained on the gallery, paralyzed with disappointment, until the noise of the car died away as it turned the corner where General Alten Street ended and the Chinese Quarter began. The gecko called seven times.

II

IT WAS ALMOST NINE O'CLOCK. A fever had gripped this lost corner of the world; it stirred in the cool of the evening, it woke up, it rose from its heat-drenched torpor. The party on board the *Tjaldane* was discussed in every street and house of the town, in the Dutch bungalows of General Alten Street, on the rickety, wooden balconies of the Chinese Quarter, in the stilted bamboo huts of the native kampongs. The club was deserted, as

all the members had rushed home to change into their dinner jackets. In the resident's mansion shadows moved to and fro behind the white curtains where the resident and his wife were in the process of getting dressed with the assistance of a host of servants. All over town buttons were moved and outmoded evening gowns altered in frantic haste. The men had grown fatter from too much beer or thinner from a recent attack of malaria, and the ladies had either lost their shapes in the idleness of the tropics or dwindled away with sick spells and boredom. *Babus* trotted on hasty errands to the *Toko* Batavia, the overcrowded store near the harbour, where the white population not only obtained their canned food and liquor but also bought imported soaps, perfumes and powders. *Sagami*, the Japanese hairdresser, attended in a frenzy of activity to neglected haircuts, while his wife rushed with her curling iron from house to house to twist the blond tresses of the Dutch ladies into the only coiffure she knew. The native market next to the fishermen's wharf was a riot of smells, colours and noises; new sarongs, pungent oils, flowers in abundance were bought in the open stalls under the glaring light of the acetylene lamps. For even if the natives were only admitted as onlookers of the great spectacle, they were a vain race and wanted to present themselves in their best attire. Cars of every make and description rattled from the outlying estates into town, stopped at the *Toko* Montor, and native chauffeurs in swanky headgear jumped out to fill their tin canisters with gasoline. From distant villages processions of natives wandered single file along the narrow roads, laughing, smoking, carrying newfangled flashlights or primitive straw torches, and redolent of all the

strong smells of the East. The wooden tom-toms were sounded in the native kampongs to tell the good news from village to village, and everybody followed the call on foot or on bicycles. A dense crowd was already squatting on the quay, expectant yet patient, as if waiting for the beginning of a play. Some of the men had even brought their fighting cocks along, to let them too have a good time, and every woman had her children in front of her and the youngest baby sleeping or suckling in her arms. The Chinese, being good businessmen, had improvised shops of some sort—an itinerant kitchen, for instance, an assortment of candies and sweetmeats, carried on bamboo poles over their shoulders. Poisonous-looking juices were peddled around, slices of pineapple, fruits and flowers. Here and there some firecrackers exploded, driving away any evil spirit who, too, might come to look at the feast of the white people; and there was a thriving business in the newest sensation of the town, little cubes of watery pink ice cream on sticks.

On the *Tjaldane* the crew was busy transforming the upper deck into a gaudy paradise-of-one-night, and the populace down at the pier watched them open-mouthed. There was an odd combination of Chinese lanterns, multi-coloured paper streamers, festoons of electric bulbs as in an amusement park, and daintily twisted bamboo decorations as if for a native celebration. The *hofmeester*, fat and important, trained the boys from the club who had been commandeered as waiters, while the cabin boys of the *Tjaldane* were busy setting up tables and chairs on the afterdeck. The squeaky noises which emerged from the boat's belly were produced by Fernando, Alfredo and Miguel, three Filipino stewards, rehearsing their

scant repertoire of dance music. An air of unrestrained excitement and great expectation surrounded everything. Those coolies who had remained on the boat hung over the rail, fraternizing with the crowd on the wharf, laughing, chatting, quarrelling, spitting copiously, and thoroughly enjoying themselves, while a furious smell rose from their steaming cooking pots.

In the narrow street behind the S.-B.-M. Line building the lorries from Lombok had arrived at last, had taken on their loads of new contract coolies and rumbled off towards the interior. The coolies hated to leave the gay, bright, crowded shore, to miss the feast of the white men, to be driven off like cattle on the dark, bumpy, alien road, past unknown kampongs, through unfamiliar palm groves and along sleeping, foreign rice fields.

Ahmet had managed to get on the same truck with Fong; it gave him a feeling of some security in all the surrounding strangeness. His little son Wajang had fallen asleep between his knees, in spite of the rattling, rocking, bouncing voyage; so had Ahmet's father. But what disturbed Ahmet greatly was that he had lost sight of his first wife and a most valuable bamboo basket with his ducks. They had been separated from him in the commotion of the arrival, and he worried lest he should never see his wife and ducks again. Fong had grown silent and Ahmet did not dare to disturb him, although his vitals were cramped with fear and many unspoken questions. The moon had risen and left the heavy mist behind, a threatening, reddish moon within the opalescent ring of a moon rainbow. It was a bad omen and frightened Ahmet. The distant mountain behind the hills looked like the shadow of an evil, crouching old man.

From the knoll where the old Portuguese fort stood Jeff and Anders listened to the rumbling that faded away as the lorries down there in the moon-drenched valley disappeared, melting into the darkness of a palm grove.

"Now you can hear the gamelan again," he said after a while. The stillness of the night was deep, a rhythmical, breathing stillness, into which the tinkle of the native music from some village fell like a thin shower of silver drops.

"Yes. The gamelan—and the bird," Jeff said under her breath. It was an invisible bird, hidden in the hibiscus hedge, and his song was made of a sad, sweet, heart-rending substance: of love. The bird seemed to have no trouble in expressing all the things that Jeff could not express; they remained in her throat, a sharp-edged pain. . . .

"How funny the moon looks," she whispered.

"Yes. It looks as if we may get rain," he answered. What they meant was: Do you love me? . . . Yes, I love you.

To make the night still quieter there came now from the inner court of the fort the long-drawn, lonely call of a bugle. The outer walls, where they were sitting, were in ruins, but the inner part of the old fort had been rebuilt and served now as a barracks for the platoon of colonial troops stationed in Sebang.

"Taps. Nine o'clock," Anders said. Jeff shivered, and he took off his white coat and wrapped it around her shoulders. It was warm from his body, it was like a secret caress, and Jeff snuggled deep into it.

"My father will be here soon," she said.

"Yes. This is the last time we shall be alone."

The night was heavy and vibrant with the sweet sorrow of their parting. Little lights climbed up the hillock and came nearer. A procession of native women stopped at the small clearing further down, where the two old cannons stood, relics of forgotten Portuguese conquests, covered with patina and lichen, half sunk into the soft ground. The women bowed to the cannons in the flickering lights of their torches as though to their pagan idols, and knelt in prayer, their small, fine hands folded before their foreheads. Then, slowly and quietly as they had come, they went away again, leaving the ground in front of the cannons covered with flowers. A layer of clouds entered the magic circle of the moonlight; their edges, suddenly hit by its radiance, became a shining vision of gigantic, moving bodies in embrace.

"It's one of the moments one never forgets," Jeff said, after the last of the women had disappeared around the bend of the path.

Anders gave a little laugh. "They prayed for more children," he said. "They believe the old cannons to be something like deities of fertility. I suppose the professor would call them phallic symbols."

"Which professor?"

"Your father."

"How did you get that idea? My father isn't a professor."

"No? But everybody on the boat calls him the professor. He seems so learned—and so absent-minded."

"It's all right, darling, you don't have to make conversation," Jeff whispered and raised her face to his questioning, waiting, demanding. He clasped his arms around her and bent his head. Jeff sighed like a dream-

ing child as she surrendered her lips to his. A jagged little curtain of mist, forerunner of the heavy clouds, reached the moon, veiled it, covered it. For a few moments the sleeping world was steeped in darkness, and then the landscape soared again into the light, with deep, black shadows, with a silver edge on every blade-like palm leaf and a dreamy reflection in Jeff's eyes.

"Jeff, my love, my only, only love . . ."

"Yes, darling, yes . . ."

Mynheer Van Halden's car heralded its arrival at the foot of the kroll with an abundance of tactful noises, with screeching of brakes, honking of horn, calling of Malay commands, thus giving them time to separate. Jeff watched her father's small, lean figure slowly scrambling up the path where shortly before the native women had proudly walked with their swinging gait. He too stopped at the two cannons and even touched them with a cautious finger, as if they were sleeping beasts. When he finally arrived at the platform under the outer walls, he found Jeff primly sitting on the rocks and Anders Anderson standing at some distance from her, demonstratively admiring the view. Both were smoking, Anders his pipe and Jeff her cigarette, and only the quick puffs of smoke betrayed something of the turmoil in their hearts.

"I have to apologize, I'm a few minutes late," Halden said politely. "I had to save Miss Vanger's life."

In the light of the moon he scrutinized the two young faces, and though it was obvious that the young people hardly listened to him, he launched into a humorous account of Miss Vanger's adventure and his intervention. The stalwart lady, it appeared, had finally found some

material for her articles on the Japanese influence in the South Seas. She had discovered a Japanese woman who had slipped in a most suspicious way into one of the Dutch bungalows, she had watched her, waited for her, followed her, as she had returned in the same secretive way which branded her as a spy, and soon she had seen her sneak into another bungalow. What had then happened was not quite clear, but when Halden had encountered Miss Vanger she was clinging to poor Mrs Sagami, the hairdresser, and a group of natives, including her own driver, were frantically yelling at her, trying to pull the Japanese out of her clutching hands. She yelled for help—"and," Halden finished with his usual chuckle, "I arrived at the spot just in time to save her life. I did not want to disillusion the good lady, and now she has a wonderful story for her magazine. The truth makes dull reading, don't you think so, Jeff?"

"What?" said Jeff. "Of course, my pet. So you saved her life, did you?"

There was a silence, as if he had told a poor joke, and then Anders pulled himself together and embarked on another piece of conversation.

"A lovely evening," he said. "And how funny the moon looks . . ."

"Well, Anderson, I'm afraid I have to break up your little party and take Josephine away from you for a short while," Halden said finally. "I trust you have your own car somewhere near."

"Yes. My boy is waiting further down the road."

"Good! We'll see you at the boat then, around eleven? Or do you plan to go directly to your plantation?"

"Lord, no. I wouldn't miss this night to save my life."

"I thought so," remarked Van Halden. "Good-bye, then, until later."

"Good-bye," Jeff said to Anders. Next time I say good-bye to you it will be forever, she thought. She had to tear herself away from him piece by piece. Anders remained leaning against the old stone wall and watched her as she went down the path and past the cannons. He saw her stooping to pick up something from the ground. Then she disappeared between the hibiscus hedges.

"What is it you picked up?" Halden asked her.

"Nothing. A little souvenir. You know I am a fiend about travel souvenirs," she said, putting the little bunch of flowers into her bag. They were soaked with dew, and the whole fragrancy of the sad and wonderful night was concentrated in the few white and yellow blossoms.

"You can't simply go around stealing offerings from the gods of fertility," Halden said with a lenient smile.

"You must at least say: 'Lord Cannon, forgive me and permit me to take these flowers from you, for my heart is yearning for them.' "

She folded her hands in front of her forehead as she had seen the native women do and repeated, half in fun and yet seriously: "Lord Cannon, forgive me and permit me to take these flowers from you, for my heart is yearning for them."

"That's it. Otherwise the gods of fertility might have grown angry at you and refused to let you have babies. You'll want to have babies later on, won't you?" her father asked.

"No. I want to die as an old maid at Bunker Hall, like my aunt Mathilda," she said.

In silence they reached the road where the big open car stood waiting for them. He helped her to get in, said a few words in Malay to the native chauffeur, and they drove off. Jeff looked back at the walls of the fort. Her father followed the direction of her glance and sighed.

"It does look nice in the moonlight, doesn't it? I am glad that place at least hasn't changed. Otherwise Sebang is quite different from what it was thirty years ago. It's a dubious pleasure, visiting one's own past, I assure you, my little girl."

He fell into a thoughtful silence, and they drove on without another word, cutting dark streaks into the silvery, swimming mist which was brewing along the roads. From time to time Mynheer Van Halden told the driver to stop, and then he looked with a puzzled expression at a house, at the cathedral-like structure of an old Banyan tree, at the greyish mounds of a Chinese burial ground, at a dilapidated little wooden church near the edge of the town. Sadly he shook his head. "It all looks much smaller—and so different," he said once.

Jeff felt sorry for him; there was such an air of loneliness about him. "Did you see any of your old friends?" she asked, to be polite.

"No. They all seem to be dead and buried. The only old-timer I found was Lung Te, the carpenter. He once made some chairs for me when I was young. We had quite a chat, very amusing and most informative. Then I went to the club and scared hell out of Jan Foster. He is quite a coward and cowards are dangerous. It's always the frightened people who start the great wars. Remember Foster? You met him once when he was on leave in Amsterdam."

"No, I don't," Jeff said. "To me all Indians on leave look alike. They are too fat and too loud and too primitive, and they have kidney trouble from drinking too much beer."

"All-except one," her father said.

"Right. All except one."

Van Halden smiled. "It is diverting to see how each generation believes itself to be the one to have discovered that unknown continent or invented that *perpetuum mobile*: love. And how disgusted they are to find out that we old people, we with our wrinkled skin and weak eyes and flabby flesh—that we too knew love! It is disgusting, isn't it, *meisje*?"

Jeff moved her shoulders uncomfortably but gave no answer.

The road stretched now alongside a native kampong, and the smell of burning wood and food, of pigsty and flowers, of incense and swampy mud, enwrapped them. The bamboo huts stood on high posts, each one with a little ladder leading up to a small opening. They looked like hunchbacks taking a walk on stilts. Moon and stars were mirrored in the small puddles between the houses. A pack of furiously barking, emaciated dogs broke from the kampong and danced crazily in front of the car, and only fell behind when it turned into the Chinese Quarter.

Most of the shops here, the *kadehs* and *toko's*, were still open, and thin shadows moved to and fro beneath the oil lamps. Tailors, cobblers, basket weavers, carpenters, craftsmen of every description were diligently working away into the night. The nasal strains of Chinese victrola records emerged from many of the wooden bal-

conies. Tangled masses of bamboo and rattan stalks were leaning against the lopsided walls of the houses. Idlers slept or smoked on stretcherlike cots in the middle of the street, to hoard as much of the night's coolness as possible. The vapours of frying oil and leeks streamed in misty clouds from the caldrons of some open eating place. The driver had to honk his horn incessantly to chase children, women and gambling, chatting and laughing men out of their way. They left the lively street behind, and now they drove beneath a canopy of old trees, alongside a narrow stream. There were no houses, it was cooler and darker here, and the air carried the pungent breath of herbs and ferns.

"Did he kiss you?" Van Halden asked suddenly. The unexpected attack startled Jeff out of her dreams.

"Now, Father, really—"

"Yes, I thought he did. The Portuguese fort is the traditional place for kisses in Sebang. Sort of lovers' lane. It's where I had my first secret meetings with Theresa. It felt strange to walk up that path once more, past the old cannons. There are ghosts waiting for me at every corner of this town; you can't see them, *meisje*, but I can. *Brenti, sobat*, stop, my friend, stop!"

The car came to a halt, the trees receded and a white little bungalow, huddled between shrubs and bushes, rose before them.

"This must be the place where we lived as newly-weds, Theresa and I," Halden said. "Yes, it is the same place, but the bungalow is new. Go on, my friend, *djalan*."

"I thought you lived in Tanatua after you were married," Jeff said, to be polite, but secretly cursing Theresa's obstinate shadow.

"No, that was later. Now we are driving to Oranje Place. I want to show you where I met her first."

"Did you know that Anders was born in Tanatua? He told me for the first time about it tonight—he very seldom talks about himself. He is shy in a way. He lived in Tanatua with his parents till he was five."

"Interesting," Van Halden said wearily.

"He is thirty now—that means that you might have seen him in Tanatua when he was a baby. Funny to think of that, isn't it? He told me that his father owned a coffee plantation in Tanatua. Maybe you knew him."

"Quite possible. Now let's get out here and walk a bit."

Oranje Place looked quiet and dignified. It was the dream of some homesick people come true. Somehow they had lifted the church, the brick houses with the white window frames and the flat pilasters, the trees, the patrician mansion, with its vast front lawn, from some Dutch home town and planted them here, in the midst of the thriving, swampy, torrid, second colonial soil.

"This is where I saw Theresa for the first time," Mynheer Van Halden said. "Come, let's walk across the lawn; no one will mind. Yes, this hasn't changed. I had come to present myself to the new resident—I had been sent here on business and I was sweating in my starched, new white suit. And Theresa came from the veranda and told me to wait, her father would see me presently, and then she made polite conversation until he came. He always sat on the veranda just in his pyjamas, but he didn't want to give the young planter a bad example and so he had squeezed himself into his uniform. Theresa wore a white blouse and a long skirt and a very tight black belt with some sort of little rhinestone on it . . ."

Jeff's thoughts were far away, and her father's reminiscent recital jingled past her ears. It all seemed hopelessly faded and outmoded, like the old photos in the family album in The Hague. She grew impatient. She had parted from Anders only half an hour ago, but already every nerve in her was aching and throbbing with yearning for him. I can't give him up, she thought, I can't.

"Father, I can't give him up," she heard herself say all of a sudden. Van Halden stopped abruptly. "I can't give him up, I have never given up anything in my life, I do not know how to do it. Won't you help me, Father? You have given me this night as a present, but it's not enough. You are so clever—don't you know a way to help me?" she went on desperately.

Her father began to shake his head. "No. There is no way," he said after a while.

"You could fire him—then he would have to go back to Europe and give up his dreadful Lombok."

"What a mean, scheming little creature you are, Josephine! You would break up a man's life so as to have him. But I'll tell you something: if I fired him today he would be on a different plantation tomorrow. You don't really know him. I do."

"But Father—"

"Come, *maisje*. Let's get back to the car," Halden said. There was more than mechanical chivalry in his gesture as he helped her into the car again; there was tenderness, pity, regret and determination. "Back to the big ship," he told the driver.

"Yes, I know Anderson and the sort of man he is," Mynheer Van Halden went on, as the car began to move. "I knew his father in Tanatua. He was my best

friend. He looked exactly like young Anders. It gave me quite a jolt when I saw young Anderson for the first time—remember? He entered the dining room of the *Tjaldane*. You know, my heart has been a bit jumpy recently—nothing serious, simply nervous, I suppose. But it was an odd moment when that dining-room door opened and Anders Anderson entered—I mean the Anderson of Tanatua.”

Jeff gripped her father’s lean shoulder. “But, Father—why didn’t you tell me about it?” she called out. The past and the present mingled in dizzy layers which confused and, in some strange way, frightened her. “You and your secrets!” she said accusingly. “Why didn’t you tell Andy? He would have been so pleased. His father died when he was a little boy, I believe. It would be so nice for him to learn that you were his father’s friend.”

“I am not so certain of that. You see, *meisje*, his father was my best friend—and he betrayed me with Theresa. Yes, he was Theresa’s lover and he wanted to take her away from me. He was a married man himself and he had a little boy, but he went after my wife and he would have left them—had he not died in time. His wife never knew anything about it; I suppose she implanted some sort of hero worship for the dead father in the boy. Tell me yourself—what should I have said to him?”

“Oh—” was all Jeff could say. “Oh—”

Van Halden’s hand went to his heart in an automatic and aimless gesture. He fought for air, and all of a sudden his face looked not like a living man’s face but like one of the grotesquely intense masks she had seen in Java.

“Father! Are you ill?” she cried, frightened.

“Yes,” he said. “Yes, it still makes me ill when I

recall the day I caught them betraying me. There is still the same nausea, as if my heart would rise into my throat and choke me—even today—even after twenty-five years—”

He lifted his shaking hand and with the back of it wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was a helpless and uncontrolled gesture which contracted Jeff's heart with pity and compassion. Still it was not easy to picture one's own father as an unhappy lover and a betrayed husband.

“Come, come, my dear,” she said gently, “try and forget the past. It all happened such a long time ago, you must have lived it down. Forget it, forget Theresa—”

Halden gave a short, mirthless laugh. “Forget Theresa!” he said. “If only I could, *meisje*, if only I could!”

“But you have forgiven her, haven't you? Everybody in The Hague told me how devoted you were to her until she died. That should have taken the sting out of it.”

“Theresa had her punishment; she was stricken with that nervous disease soon afterwards, a slow paralyzing of limb after limb. Some—some higher law had taken matters in hand. Yes, that's the whole story,” Halden said; he tried hard to gain control of himself. “I'm sorry, little *meisje*,” he added. “I shouldn't have told you. I've never talked about it to anyone in all my life. It is such a relief to talk for once; it has been like an iron fence around me, it has made me a very lonely man and barred all human contacts. You would not understand what it meant to live as the cheated husband in a small community like Tanatua. The whispering behind my

back, the sudden silence when I entered a room, the hidden smirk on the faces of my assistants—" He attempted a laugh, but it came out as a moan.

Jeff took his hand in hers; it was limp and lifeless, like a damp piece of cloth. "Don't, Father, don't!" she begged him. "It's bad for you, it's bad for your heart." For the first time it dawned on her that a world of suspicion and suffering had separated her father from her dead mother. For the first time she realized that her mother had been punished for the sins Theresa had committed.

"Can't you forget, Father, please, can't you forget?" she pleaded with him. He appeared to her like a sick and obstinate child that needed her protection and had to be coaxed and wheedled into rest. Now she began to understand what he had meant when he spoke of growing pains. She felt that she had grown up years in every hour of this remarkable evening. Patting her father's hand, she looked around. They were driving along the little native harbour now, where the fishing boats had gone to sleep at their moorings, their square sails folded up like the wings of enormous bats, their planks creaking softly in the swell and sway of the wavelets. Here and there a lantern threw snakelike reflections into the deep blackness of the water.

"Forget!" her father said bitterly. "It isn't so easy to forget! If you found young Anderson in the arms of another girl, could you forget it?"

Jeff, for a panicky second, pictured Anders in the arms of another girl, of Pat Houston, for instance, who had kissed him so fervently for a farewell. But the bitter image dissolved swiftly into friendlier visions. His open face, his shy and awkward smile, the way he bent his

head before a door, anxious to bring all his six feet four through without damaging the doorframe . . .

"Now you will understand that there is no way out for you and young Anderson," her father said into her thoughts. "If he were the only man on earth I would not let you have him."

Jeff flared up at once. "Why can't you leave dead people alone!" she said fiercely. "Anders' father is dead. We are alive, it's our turn to live. Anders is not his father."

"No, but he is his father's son. I know his sort, I know his blood. He would only make you unhappy—and I could not bear to think of him near you. You must admit that I have been more than lenient, considering the circumstances. But I would not let you marry him—"

"He doesn't want to marry me. I asked him and he said no, if you must know—" Jeff cried and stopped abruptly. There I go again, she thought. Always fighting with Father, always doing the wrong thing. A quiet trip. Rest. No excitement. A lot of rest I'm giving him!

Her father linked his arm in hers and drew her gently closer. "I am afraid this visit to Sebang has not turned out a success," he said, composed and his old, superior self again. "I had an idea that I could wipe out or at least blur those bitter memories by going back to the places where I was happy. It has not worked out that way. It was a bad break for me that young Anderson came aboard; it's one of those unfortunate coincidences which are not included in any doctor's prescription. Looking at that young man across the dinner table for almost three weeks has made everything as new and fresh and painful as if it had happened yesterday. And to see history

repeat itself and watch you falling in love with him—Do you understand, now, that this little drive of ours has been more than the whim of a cranky old man? But don't let's talk about it ever again. There is the *Tjaldane*."

Yes, there she was, bright and alive, with her chains of lighted portholes, her garlands and festoons, with a clutter of native canoes under her bow, looking very big, very high, very important in the small harbour. The wharf was a dense carpet of gaily clad natives, the air resounded with shouts and laughter, with the reports of firecrackers and the strains of the three-man band aboard. An uninterrupted stream of guests was arriving at the foot of the gangway, greeted by six boys in white uniform and red-golden headcloths and led up the narrow, perilously bouncing gangway. There was such an air of festivity about the whole place that even Mynheer Van Halden began to smile. The moon had shrunk and paled; it was a small, insignificant planet which looked jealously down at the blazing brilliancy of the man-made lights down there.

"At last!" Anders Anderson said, bobbing up from the crowd and helping Jeff out of the car. "I thought you would never arrive!" He took her arm and led her towards the gangway, forgetting once more that the little old gentleman trailing after them was her father.

III

CHARLEY ELLINGTON, the young English engineer, came from his camp in the mountain jungles where he was

building the new road to the mines, driving furiously towards Sebang. At the bridge over the Kuri River, which marked the limits of Lombok plantation, he met four of the lorries with the contract coolies. He honked his asthmatic horn without restraint as they blocked his way and almost brought him to a stop. The bridge was a flimsy piece of construction, and the coolies had been ordered to take their bags and bundles off the trucks and carry them across on foot, so as not to overtax the capacity of the swaying planks. Charley found himself cutting into a slow, sticky, unresilient stream of human bodies, bent under their baggage and marching against the direction of his car. It was like getting stuck in hot lava, an experience Charley had undergone once and hoped never to undergo again. When Charley threw her into first gear, his ancient little Ford, generally referred to as Minnie Mouse, shook with a coughing spell and spat angry fumes through its broken exhaust pipe. The end of the bridge was completely clogged by the four lorries. Some commands which Charley shouted at the drivers bore no result, for they were Lombok men, and the little *tuan* who lowered himself to the extent of driving his own car had no power over them. Minnie Mouse possessed only one functioning headlight, which gave her a rakish and cunning air; in its awry beam Charley could see the everlasting expression on all native faces: a sleepy, noncommittal, sullen grin.

"The blighters!" he muttered, coaxed his car into reverse, coasted her down the riverbank and, hoping to God she would not get stuck in the muddy bottom, drove her through the shallow bed. "Good girl—we made it!" he told her as she asthmatically climbed up

the bank at the other side, skirted the lorries and was on her way to Sebang once more.

It was shortly after ten o'clock when he turned into General Alten Street. Ann Foster, who had started writing a letter but had given up in the midst of it, recognized the incomparable noises which announced to the world at large the arrival of Minnie Mouse; she straightened up, automatically smoothed her hair and even began to smile. For the last hour she had just been sitting there, under the orange lampshade, with limply dangling hands, too tired to move, too sorry for herself even to cry. Now she got up and went down the front garden, to be at the little gate when Charley arrived.

He vaulted out of the car—Minnie Mouse had lost her running boards long ago—shook Ann's hand with the violence of a young tidal wave, called a joke to Madeh who came leisurely striding from the kitchen, tenderly twisted the *babu's* ear, an intimacy she accepted with a grin and a bow, he patted the radiator of Minnie Mouse as if she were a winning racehorse, dragged his well-worn suitcase from her innards, hurled it into the water boy's arms and finally fastened his eyes on Ann's willowy figure.

"Good heavens, Ann, aren't you dressed yet?" he called out in dismay. "And I nearly murdered poor Minnie Mouse trying to get here in time! Eighty-five minutes and twenty-four seconds, including at least four minutes' delay at Kuri River and another three minutes climbing up a tree for your corsage! Shaving and skinning myself in an effort to look my prettiest. Bringing along my only pair of long bags to make up for the lack of the proverbial evening jacket which—as is known all over the world

—other British gentlemen insist on wearing even in the deepest jungle.” He gave her a hurried look. “I say, you do look a bit seedy. Is there anything the matter?”

“Did you really come all the way from the camp?” Ann asked, scanning his mud-caked face, his too long legs sticking out from too short shorts, his sunburned bare arms which were covered with a light blonde fluff, his beaming schoolboy’s face that was suntanned up to the forehead and much lighter where the topee usually shaded it. “It is good to see you, Charley,” she said.

“Thank you, madam, thank you indeed. This remark of yours is well worth risking my life. Yes, I’ve come all the way, racing down from the Second Lake, to be at your service, to squire you, to dance my famous slow fox with you, to carry your train, push your chair and do nothing a gentleman wouldn’t do.”

He lighted a new cigarette on his old one, shoved it into the left corner of his mouth and bent over the car to lift from it—with hands which suddenly grew tender and careful—a glorious spray of white orchids.

“For you, your excellency,” he said with the parody of a bow that would have done him credit at Buckingham Palace. Ann had never seen him without a cigarette, not even when they were swimming in the primitive tank at the club. She had never seen him serious, either. At intervals of four to six weeks he emerged from the jungle, broke into town like a hurricane, ate, drank and bathed luxuriously, gorged himself with the latest news from Europe, devoured every paper and magazine he could find, hungrily swallowed the intermittent scraps of music from Batavia or Surabaya which he could sometimes coax from the radio at the club; he told every

woman that he loved her, making it sound like a good joke; picked up his mail, the books and some mysterious parcels he had ordered from England, visited his friends, grew sentimental around two o'clock at night, sang Welsh folk songs around three and very risqué ditties in Malay at four, and returned contentedly to his camp around five, just as the cocks began to crow in the kampongs and the heavy white morning mist of the tropics ushered in the next day. He had developed his own code and complied with none of the rules for colonial life. He was his own cook, chauffeur and servant, without losing his prestige. He exposed himself to heat and sun, slept without a net, drank unboiled water and ate native food, without ever getting ill. He did not—and this was his own deepest secret—let himself get down, he did not give himself up to the slow and persistent decay of the white man in the tropics.

"How in the world did you hear of the party on the *Tjaldane*?" Ann asked him. There was, it seemed, more of an evening breeze and there were fewer mosquitoes in the garden since Charley's arrival.

"Now, really, Ann! How could I miss hearing of something so momentous? I have a phone, haven't I? And I have good friends in town. Besides, I have been officially invited by the S.-B.-M. people—extremely courteous of them, don't you think so? And I would have come to town anyway, because Andy Anderson has arrived and I wanted to be with him for his first binge at the club. But don't let's waste time with idle chatter. You have to get dressed. Bring out the green brocade and be perfectly dazzling."

They were still at the garden gate, with the expectantly

smiling servants crowding around the car. "I am not going to the party, Charley," said Ann.

"You are not-nonsense! I won't listen to such tosh. Put on the war paint while I change into those beastly long bags and let's go. Come, give me a hand, Madeh. Don't be afraid, it's tied." He had pried open the dilapidated luggage compartment which stuck out like a Victorian bustle from the rear of Minnie Mouse and, talking soothingly in Malay, began with Madeh's help to lift something heavy from it.

"What did you bring there?" Ann asked, somewhat intimidated. Charley's gifts were mostly on the eccentric side.

"A little offering to Batara Guru, the master of the house," Charley said as he deposited a big, green, live reptile at her feet. It was a leguan, its muzzle and its almost human paws tied with strings of alang-alang grass. From its slanting eyes it glowered with a mean and vicious expression at no one in particular.

"Fresh from the jungle. Four yards of the most delicious dinner you've ever tasted. I know my manners as a guest," Charley said triumphantly. "'Never forget to please your week-end host with some small attention. Any inexpensive gift, if personal, will be more appreciated than even the most expensive impersonal present bought at the jewellery store.' Katharine Myrtle, page 126." Katharine Myrtle's book on good manners was one of Charley's various inventions; she was a merely fictitious character, lovingly quoted by him whenever an eyebrow was raised at his eccentricities.

"Good gracious!" was all Ann could say. The trouble with leguan was that it tasted exactly as it looked and

that it took more days to eat it up from head to tail than was advisable in the climate of Sebang.

"Take her away," Charley grandly ordered Madeh, and, grasping for Ann's hand, he pulled her onto the gallery.

"This is for the Governor," he said, producing a crudely carved choo-choo train from a brown paper parcel, which he had clasped under his arm until now. "Charley made it himself, good old Uncle Charley."

Ann could not help laughing. "But Charley, Jan is not even a year old," she said. "He is much too young for it. He has never seen a train—and it will be long before he'll get to any place where there are any."

"What of it?" Charley said. "All the more reason to give him one. 'Inspire the imagination of our dear little ones,' advises Katharine Myrtle. Pity that my gifts are not appreciated in this family. My feelings are hurt. I'm going now into a corner to sulk."

"Your orchids are splendid, Charley," Ann said, smiling at the spray of white stars in her hand. "I've never seen any like these."

"Where are you going to wear them? In your hair? Or on your shoulder? They should match beautifully with your skin."

Ann blushed slowly. She was not used to such unobtrusive compliments. But suddenly the whole extent of her misery descended upon her and she said desperately: "You forget that I am not going to the party."

"So you said before, but you don't expect me to listen to such insipid talk. Tell me where I can wash behind the ears while you put on the green brocade. We have no time to lose. Good heavens, Ann, it happens only once

in a lifetime that a boat'll remain overnight in this place."

"My husband doesn't want me to go."

"Don't say 'my husband,' it sounds disgustingly intimate. 'When referring to your husband always mention him as Mr Smith, Mr Foster,' says Katharine Myrtle and, I assure you, the old girl knew husbands. Good lord, Ann, you don't bow down under Batara Guru's frequent eruptions, do you? What if he doesn't want you to go? *You* want to go, don't you? Of course you want to go. Well, why don't you fight for the things you want?"

Ann stared unhappily at the young engineer. He seemed almost serious now as he looked at her with his deep-set eyes under heavy, whitish eyebrows. A thin thread of smoke spiralled from the cigarette in the left corner of his mouth. She had never seen him as closely as that. There were three white crow's-feet on each side of his eyes, where the sun could not tan his skin. It's easy for you to talk big, she thought sadly. But I am tired, I am much too tired to fight for anything.

"I am too tired, Charley," she said.

"I know, I know. I know the whole story. But, damn it, Ann, you have to fight for the things you want or you will never get them. You have to fight for every little joy in your life and for every step that takes you ahead. Good heavens, Ann, do I have to take you by the scruff of your neck and shake you out of your stupor?"

"I do not dare to go. If my husband—if Mr Foster comes home—"

"Mr Foster won't come home. If I wanted to tell you a lie, I would say that I spoke to him on my way and that he has enough trouble on his hands to be kept busy on the plantation for a week. But being the product of a

good English public school and having been educated to lie only when definitely profitable, I shan't do it. It is true, however, that Foster won't come home tonight."

"How do you know?"

"I happen to understand the code of the tontongs. And, as the natives say, rumours travel with the wind. If he should come home, you would still have got all what you wanted and he could not take it away from you, could he? Now step lively, Ann. It's almost eleven o'clock. Not another word! If *you* are too tired to want anything, *I* am not. From this minute on I am the one to tell you what to do. Madeh! *Babu! Djongos!* Help the *nonja*, quick, *lekas, lekas*, she wants to take a bath, a real bath in a tub, d'you understand? *Babu*, you bring out the green brocade dress, and if you are going to tell me that the termites ate it up I shall murder you. Really, Ann, what you need is not quinine and liver pills, it's a small infusion of fun from time to time. We shall dance, we shall have all the fun, all the— No, not these shoes, *djongos!* I fancy there must be some silver slippers somewhere, I saw you wear them on the Queen's Birthday, Ann. Don't worry about me, I shall wash in the kitchen and change in the servants' quarters, it will still be more luxurious than in the camp. I give you twenty minutes to make yourself the most beautiful *nonja* in all Sebang. And—Ann—I think the orchids will look best on your shoulder."

He was gone and Ann, still dazzled, came up for air. To have Charley for a friend was like associating with a hurricane, like riding on high waves or sailing with a strong gale. The next fifteen minutes were an orgy of palpitating, breath-taking, almost forgotten preoccupa-

tion with herself. She emerged with a strong vigorous feeling of being alive at last. This was her skin, her face, these were her own eyes in the mirror, sparkling with zest, this was she herself, Ann Foster, her own hair, her own smile, her own blood pulsing in her veins--this was she, resurrected from some slow, rotting death. She clasped her bracelets around her wrists; they felt cool and pleasant on the irritated, mosquito-bitten skin. She stretched her toes in the silver shoes and sprayed a liberal amount of eau de Cologne on her dress to cover up the musty smell of mould which clung to everything one took from the wardrobes. She plucked a few stray hairs from her eyebrows and dabbed another bit of rouge on her cheeks. Then she tiptoed once more to the cot to have a look at little Jan. He too had pink cheeks now, as if her own glow were reflected on his sleeping little face. Why did I ever think him too pale? she thought wonderingly. He is not pale at all. She left him in the *babu's* care and picked up her fan and gloves, just as Charley returned from the obscure regions, where he had transformed himself into a clean-looking English college boy, dressed in an outgrown or shrunk white Sunday-afternoon linen suit.

"I'll be damned!" he said as she turned to him.

"You like me in this dress?"

"Like you? Good heavens, Ann!" was all he said, but it was expressive enough to give her a feeling of that buoyancy which she had thought was lost forever.

A minute later she was installed in the front seat of Minnie Mouse and gaily careering down General Alten Street. The *babu* looked after them from the garden gate before she returned to the *klamboe* room and squatted

down next to the little master's cot, a tender, faithful, reliable sentinel.

IV

AROUND MIDNIGHT the party on board the *Tjaldane* was in full swing, and its splendour, sweep and hilarity exceeded even the wildest expectations. The people of Sebang, awakened from their drab sleep of isolation, threw themselves wholeheartedly into the festivity. The Dutch planters and officials and their wives, stiff and provincially decorous for the first hour, loosened up under the influence of an ample supply of free champagne, and the broad sensuality of their nature came to the fore. They ate and drank and feasted with the vigour and abandon of a painting by Jan Steen. The endless courses of the customary *Rijsttafel* were served on the afterdeck as a procession of sixteen native waiters marched solemnly by, each one offering two dishes of hot, over-seasoned, spiced food. The foredeck belonged to those who wanted to dance. Fernando, Alfredo and Miguel, the Filipino stewards, were sawing, blowing and banging away on their instruments, driven into a fine frenzy of rhythm by the Latin part of their mixed blood. Squatting on the boards along the rail, the native housekeepers in their best array mingled with the vendors of flowers, palm-leaf fans and cheap silver jewellery. They had followed their masters onto the boat under the thin pretence

of carrying the *tuan's* things, his *barang-barang*, in the flat bags which they held ostentatiously on their laps. It was a silently tolerated custom in Sebang to have the *njais* present at such festive occasions, though not only did no one speak to them but they were ignored like invisible beings. Yet their supple bodies, their flower-adorned heads, their beautiful silk *badjus* and sarongs, added grace and an intangible exotic charm to the party. Too proud, too indolent or too well educated to show any emotion on their faces, they watched the events with the indifferent big dark eyes of captive animals, and no one cared what they might think of the explosions of laughter, the heavy-footed stamping and tramping, the open love-making and the raucous singing of the white people.

Somehow it had transpired that Mynheer Van Halden was the president of the Singapore-Batavia-Manila Line as well as of the Netherlands Indies Tin & Rubber Company and also the host of tonight. No one could have told how the rumour got around. Vandengraaf might have whispered it behind his hand to someone, Captain Brookhuis might have broken down under the burden of the secret; Jan Foster might have told it to his assistants, or the resident might have recognized the face with the soft white moustache from a photo which hung in the local bank. It was most probable, though, that Mynheer Van Halden himself had decided to lift his incognito rather than be cornered by Vandengraaf, for he took it all with good grace. He patted shoulders, promised advancement, he talked sentimentally of old times, drank the official toast to the Queen's health; he even danced with the *nonja* resident and conversed with the con-

trollers; in short, he did all the boring things he had hoped to avoid. The passengers of the *Tjaldane* watched him, slightly dumbfounded by the fact that their most unassuming fellow traveller had turned out to be the *deus ex machina* of the night.

"Thank God I didn't know it before," Anders Anderson said to Jeff. "Or do you think I would ever have gone near you had I known that you are the daughter of the almighty boss?"

Jeff murmured that she didn't think he would; but Anders did not seem reconciled.

"Pretty mean of you, I must say. Making an ass of me, letting me go around calling your old man 'professor.' It's quite a blow to my trusting nature to find out that you're such an accomplished liar."

"I didn't lie. I simply didn't tell you everything I knew. My father has educated me like that; he has imprinted it on my mind since I was a child that being discreet is law number one for any well-bred person."

"I'm glad you were discreet in this case, you well-bred person, or I would have missed everything."

"Missed what?" Jeff asked. She tried to appear light-hearted, but the weight of all the things she had learned tonight and had to keep to herself loaded her down.

"This, for instance," Anders said and bent down to kiss her. Every one of their kisses had the heartbreaking, intensive sweetness of being the last one.

Jeff came up breathlessly, as if a huge wave had swept over her. "Listen to that racket!" she said.

They stood in the narrow companionway, and on the deck above their heads the Dutch had started another one of their old-fashioned square dances. Jeff and

Anders had gone below to visit the remaining coolies. It had been Jeff's idea that they too should have a party. Thus a long table had been rigged up and a sumptuous meal of rice and fish and chicken had been ladled out to them. Now they sat on their mats, well filled, politely belching with appreciation, utterly pleased and contented. Jeff envied them. How simple life could be when a filled rice bowl meant happiness and peace!

"How late is it?" she asked Anders.

"Still an eternity before dawn," he told her, yet they felt the time streaming by like a fast-flowing river which would in the end tear them apart.

"Come, let's go and dance," Anders suggested impatiently. "I'll bring my victrola on deck and we'll play 'Strange Enchantment'." Jeff had teased him once or twice about his exaggerated pride in his victrola and his excessive attachment to it. And Anders, suddenly growing serious, had answered: "You don't understand what a companion a victrola becomes if one lives all alone on a plantation." "Strange Enchantment" was *their* record; it belonged in the same class with the Green Ray. Love, that shining mosaic, is made of such broken little bits and pieces, each one small and insignificant by itself, but all of them together the most precious fabric on earth. They had danced on deck to the slow, dragging strains of "Strange Enchantment" almost every night, all alone under the big stars of the tropical skies. They had carried the victrola up to the boat deck and played "Strange Enchantment," listening silently, their hearts beating, their hands drawn to each other across a small, vibrant universe, while the *Tjaldane* cut a fluorescent road of emeralds in the sea. To dance to its memory-laden rhythms

for the last time, on the crowded deck, in the midst of strange, jubilant, noisy, unfeeling people, was heaven with all the tortures and fires of hell thrown in.

Charley Ellington, who was sitting out this dance with Ann, watched them, amused but slightly troubled.

"It seems Andy's got it quite badly," he remarked.

"Got what?" Ann asked, fanning her burning face. She had drunk two glasses of champagne, or maybe three, and she was walking, dancing, floating on curly little clouds. Charley's voice seemed to come from far away, although his face was very near and surprisingly attractive. "Got what?"

"The measles," Charley answered. "It's definitely dangerous if a grown-up person catches it for the first time."

This seemed very funny to Ann, and she giggled. Charley gave her a reproachful glance. "Nothing funny about that. Andy is my best friend, and I don't like to see him hurt by that lass," he said. "If you will excuse me for a moment, I think I shall ask her for a dance and talk sense into her. How is your equilibrium?"

He piloted Ann to the afterdeck and deposited her with the *nonja* resident. Anders' victrola stopped, the dance was finished, and he pushed his way into the cluster of people around the improvised bar to forage for a glass of champagne to bring to Jeff. The moment his victrola had given out, Fernando, Alfredo and Miguel hurled themselves into a frantic rumba and Charley blocked Jeff's way.

"Remember Kipling's description of the dance of the wild elephants?" he said. "I am one of them. Would you risk this rumba with me?"

Jeff found herself swept into the centre of the dancing crowd, where he began to explain to her that lonely young plantation inspectors were entirely unsuitable partners for either a deck flirtation or marriage. When Anders, the object of Charley's protective measures, returned with two filled champagne glasses, he could not find Jeff. Looking around for a place to set down his glasses, he discovered a small table behind the platform of the band and struggled towards it.

"Hello, Mr Anderson," said Pat, stepping out from a bower of pink tissue-paper blossoms. She wore the low-cut evening dress covered with an abundance of rhinestones in which Anders had seen her first, at the Nirvana in Port Said. With it she wore an orange-coloured paper cap and on her right shoulder an arrangement of artificial red roses, big as cabbages.

"Hello, Pat. Having a good time?" he asked, searching everywhere for a trace of Jeff.

"A wonderful time," Pat said much too enthusiastically. "It's all so wonderful, isn't it?"

"Rather," Anders said. "You look very pretty, Pooch," he added affably.

At once Pat began to blossom and to glow from within. She had been a bit lonely up to now, what with Mr Anderson dancing every single dance with That Girl and Dr Maverick having disappeared with the local doctor and not having returned so far. The discovery that That Girl was the daughter of a rich and influential man hadn't made things any more pleasant; it left an odd, ugly taste in Pat's mouth. Like if you chew aspirin instead of swallowing it whole, she thought.

Anders felt her pleading glance and said, with an at-

tempt to sound cheerful: "Have some champagne. Here's to you! 'Till we meet again."

Pat drank the whole glass, pulled a face at the sizzling sweetness, but felt much better a moment after.

"You wouldn't care to dance with me, would you?" she asked.

Just then Anders discovered Jeff, wiggling in rumba rhythm with the incessantly talking Charley. "Of course I want to dance with you," he said hurriedly, and putting his arm around her, he took her onto the improvised dance floor. To his immense relief the rumba changed into a fox trot and for a while they danced in silence. Pat closed her eyes, and Anders was almost surprised at his own pleasure and ease. They had danced a lot together, and their bodies, well acquainted and used to each other assumed automatically the familiar steps and posture. To Anders this dance was a brief rest from the tearing, yearning hunger he felt whenever he touched Jeff. For Pat it was a last flight into her lost paradise.

"Nice going," he said after a while.

"I'll say it's nice," Pat murmured. The little band stopped and everybody applauded. Anders too applauded without letting go of Pat, and the fox trot started anew.

"You like dancing with me?" Pat asked a little later.

"You know how much I like it, Pooch. You're the best dancer I've ever met; I told you so, didn't I? It's like flying—so smooth, so easy."

This was the sort of stuff on which Pat's dreams had fed all the way from Port Said to Singapore. She gathered all her pluck to ask in a whisper: "Tell me, d'you think I am a better dancer than Miss Halden?"

"Of course you are. There's no comparison. She dances

like any young lady who's had a few dancing lessons; but you dance with the perfection of a professional."

It wasn't much, but it was enough for Pat. A triumphant smile spread over her face and changed it suddenly into something translucent and innocent. Anders, as on the evening he had met her at the Nirvana, was slightly touched by the transformation some simple friendliness worked on her. There was so much sweetness and humility behind the gaudy and brash surface of girls like Pat.

"It always makes me very proud when you condescend to dance with a fellow like me, who is all left feet," he said, smiling down at her. Once more Pat felt as though she were made of thin, expensive porcelain. She danced on in silence, growing lighter and lighter, soaring up and up, forgetting herself and everything around them.

"Now it's all over," she said as the music stopped.

"That's very regrettable," Anders said politely, leading her back to the pink bower where he had found her. She grasped his hand and held onto it.

"Just one moment, Mr Anderson," she said fervently.

"Come, come, Pooch. Don't make another scene now," he said, embarrassed and even annoyed. She was not drunk tonight, but she was unbalanced and high-strung, and no wonder, with the sort of life she had led during the last year.

"Don't you worry, I'm not making a scene. I just want to thank you—for everything, Mr Anderson, for everything. And if there is anything I can do for you, I just want you to know that there is nothing I wouldn't do for you," she said urgently. There was a strict and severe code in the world where she had lived, an unelastic rule

of give and take. It was the first time that someone had been generous to her, the first time she had received something for nothing, as she, in her crude vocabulary, put it. It left her helpless with gratitude and admiration. "I mean—you've told me once how lonesome it is on your plantation," she went on, groping for words. "If you—if you should want someone for company—I would not mind staying there for a while. Mrs Gould told me that most of the planters have coloured girls for housekeepers—I think it's a shame. I—I could keep house for you much better, I like cooking, I am really good at it—now don't you think you could use me?"

"Now you're talking nonsense," Anders said curtly, but Pat, absorbedly, steered her own course.

"It's not nonsense, Mr Anderson. I saw a movie once, I've forgotten the title, but Jean Harlow played in it and Clark Gable, and it all took place on a rubber plantation just like yours. And there was a lady like that girl—anyway, there was a lady, and she nearly wrecked Clark Gable's life. But then along came this little tramp and she drank with him and she didn't get sick or anything and in the end Clark Gable was happy she stayed with him. I wouldn't get sick either, Mr Anderson, I'm tough, even if I don't look it."

Anders Anderson had not seen *Red Dust*, yet from Pat's halting narrative he conceived a faint idea of the things she wanted to convey to him.

"That's very, very sweet of you, Pat, and I won't forget it," he said uncomfortably. "Of course it would be nice to have you for company, and I'm sure you would keep my little bungalow shipshape and all that. But it cannot be done, and I'll tell you why not: you are much

too pretty, Pat. You would upset the entire Estate, and there would be murder and killing if a girl with your looks should pop up in Lombok. You do understand that, don't you? And now you must excuse me—I think the resident wants to talk to me.”

He was gone and Pat was left alone in her bower of pink tissue paper. Frowningly she contemplated Anders' exit speech. It had been flattering if anything, and there was no definite refusal of her offer in it as far as she could make out. She had seen such movies, too, in which a tough and pretty girl broke into the isolated places of the wilds where only rough, strong men were living. Such a girl was either killed in the process of offering some supreme sacrifice or she got Clark Gable in the end. Pat sauntered over to the bar to think things over.

“How charming of you to look for me at last!” Jeff said when Anders, pushing his way through the frolicking crowd, arrived at her side. “I just thought I might as well go to my cabin and sleep.”

“But Jeff, darling, you were dancing with someone else.”

“So were you—and most enraptured. What's that girl to you, anyway?”

“But I've told you. A shipboard acquaintance. A very casual shipboard acquaintance.”

“If that is what you call casual I would like to see how you act when you are not so casual.”

Anders began to laugh happily. “Jeff, if you show so plainly that you are jealous, I shall get very conceited,” he said to the unresponsive back which Jeff had turned on him. If he could have heard some of the stories

Charley Ellington had told her in order to convince her of Anders' ineligibility, he would have understood her jealousy. He put his hand under her elbow and pulled her towards the stairs. "Come, come," he pleaded with her, "let's get out of this hubbub, let's go up on the boat deck. We must talk this over sensibly."

Up there, where the shadow of the funnel was blackest, another couple had settled down—Ann Foster and Charley. Ann had reached the second, the sentimental and confidential, stage of being tipsy, and Charley had piloted her up to the boat deck for a breath of fresh air. While she kept on talking, relieving herself in a stream of plaintive words, he watched intently the dark canopy of the sky over the interior of the island. Two, three times there was a flash of distant lightning, lifting for the fraction of a second the jagged contours of the mountains from the surrounding blackness. He strained his ears, but no rumbling of thunder was audible.

"... so I told him, 'why did you bring me to the Indies if everything I do annoys you?'" Ann was saying. The account of her marital trouble went by his ears while his mind travelled to that distant mountain range which once more was steeped in light and swallowed up again in darkness. Up there was the Second Lake, his camp, his road, his work. "It's a filthy shame," he said without listening to Ann; thinking of one thing only: If we get a storm up there, the rain'll wash away the new foundation of Section Five and we'll have to do it all over again. I should have insisted on finishing the cementing before to-night.

"... I am not talking about myself, Charley," Ann was saying. "I've got used to malaria and dysentery and

what not. I wouldn't mind dying—no, not a bit. But what about the baby, Charley, what about little Jan? It's no joke to bury two babies; believe me, it has taken my last ounce of strength. If little Jan should get ill, I don't know what I would do. I'd kill my husband—I'd kill myself, honestly, I would."

Charley clicked his tongue, producing a few consoling noises. "Why, in the name of heaven, should the Governor get ill?" he asked. "He looked splendid when I saw him tonight."

"I'm afraid, Charley—can't you see? All the time I'm afraid, every single minute. I've begged Jan to let me go away for a while, let me take the Sumatra boat and go up to Brastagi with little Jan, let him have some mountain air. He needs it—this place is bad for him, believe me."

"Well, why don't you take him away, then?"

"Jan won't let me do it. You don't know him. He is—you know what the tropics do to some men. He's brutal, uncontrolled. Sometimes he is like a man who runs amuck. He has beaten me—and the baby."

"Good lord, Ann!" said Charley, shaken to the roots of his decent little-schoolboy's soul. He looked at her from the corner of his eyes. "Would it do you any good to cry a bit on my shoulder?" he suggested, pained by the expression on her face, so void of emotion, so drenched of life.

"Yes, it would do me good. But I can't cry," she said monotonously. "I have even forgotten how to cry."

"Shall I knock him out? Shall I beat the fear of God into Batara Guru the next time I see him at the club?"

Ann deprecated this offer with a shrug. "What's the use?" she said.

"First of all it would be an enormous relief to me. And then--"

"Relief to you? Why?"

There was a moment's silence. "Good heavens, Ann," Charley said then, "don't you know that I love you?"

He did not look at her, he did not touch her, his eyes were riveted to the distant mountain range and his voice sounded as if he were talking about the weather. Ann straightened up imperceptibly, as a straggling soldier would to the sound of a very distant bugle.

"No, I didn't know that," she said a little later, taking a deep breath.

There *was* a rainstorm in the mountains. The flashes of lightning followed in shorter intervals, but they didn't come closer. Behind the range there was a second range, made of heavy black clouds, a brewing darkness from which the lightning lifted steel edges and phantom faces.

"No thunder," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Ann asked him. He smiled at her; it was so dark in the shadow of the funnel that he could hardly discern her face.

"Did you ever hear the fairy tale the natives tell about Lightning and Thunder?" he said. "It appears that Lightning was a slim young princess who fell asleep in the woods. Along came Thunder, the big, black, spotted giant, with his club, saw her and fell in love at first sight. Lightning woke up and ran away as swiftly as her light feet would carry her. Thunder, a heavy fellow, slow of movement, followed her. He has followed her ever since and never caught up with the slim little princess. That is why the flash always comes before the thunder. There is no moral to the story, for the Malays are an amoral race."

He was not sure that Ann had listened. "Have you got a match?" she asked after a brief pause.

He lighted a match for her and kept it in the hollow of his hand. "At your service, madam," he said. "Want a cigarette?"

"No. I just wanted to see your face for a moment. You have such funny white creases around your eyes, Charley. You know—if we weren't in Sebang, Charley, maybe—maybe—I would love you, too."

Charley took her face between his hands, and very carefully, very deliberately, he tied it into a chain of kisses. Ann closed her eyes and let it happen as she let everything happen, never fighting anything off, never doing anything herself. Charley took her shoulder and shook it gently.

"Ann, do something," he said. "Slap my face—or kiss me."

Ann did not open her eyes. "It's restful," she said. "It's like standing in a spring rain."

Suddenly she seemed to wake up. She withdrew, sat up, straightened her hair. "I am very unhappy, Charley," she said earnestly.

"Why don't you leave him?"

"Leave him? Where should I go, Charley? There is no place where I belong. My parents are dead. I have not a cent to my name, I couldn't pay my fare—and what about little Jan? I've asked for a divorce—not once, often, Charley. He won't give it to me. He'll keep me a prisoner until I die—and little Jan, too."

"I'll talk to him. I'll see to it that you get back to Holland. Heavens, Ann, I simply cannot let you rot away like this!"

"You would ask him to give me a divorce?"

"Indeed I would. And in very plain language at that."

Ann stirred a bit, like someone coming to after a faint. "I have a school friend in Enschede, she might invite me for a few weeks until I get a job. I've been a good stenographer, I might even get my old job back, with the S.-B.-M. office in Amsterdam. I might—"

"There—that's better. I'll visit you in jolly old Amsterdam next time I go on leave."

Ann went limp again. "You are always joking, Charley. You don't take anything seriously. First you say that you love me—and then you want me to go so far away that you'll never see me again."

"Yes, madam, that's my special brand of love. To you it's important to get away. To me it's important to stay on. It's a bit unfortunate, but these are the facts: I shall spend my whole life in beastly places. I have built roads in the Fiji Islands, in Borneo, on the Malay Peninsula, where it is most unpleasant. I have a precognition that I'll go to Alaska after my work here is finished. You, on the other hand, are a city girl—worse: the city must be Amsterdam or you will dwindle away with homesickness. I love you enough to try to get you back home where you belong—but not enough either to bring or accept sacrifices. However, I go on leave once in a while, and all the airplanes to London stop in Amsterdam—"

A tall white figure stepped into the black shadow of the funnel. "I'm sorry to intrude, Mrs Foster," Anders Anderson said, "but I must have a word with Charley. It's imperative."

"Gladly, Mr Anderson," Ann said, folding her limp hands resignedly in her lap. The nonsense one talks after

two glasses of champagne! she thought. The faint spark of energy which Charley Ellington had kindled in her mind died down the moment he left her side.

"Charley, you've got to do me a favour," Anders said vehemently, pulling his friend to the stairs which led from the boat deck down to the gay happenings on the main deck. "You must take care of Pat. She's had a few drinks too many and she's getting out of hand. Things are becoming rather unpleasant. She wants to start a brawl with Jeff-Miss Halden, I mean—and she is my responsibility."

"Who's Pat?" Charley asked cautiously.

"The girl in the white dress with the rhinestones. There she is at the bar again, for God's sake—"

"Pretty. Exceedingly pretty. And you are responsible for her? You lucky dog!"

"In a way. I picked her up in some dive in Port Said and took her along for company. Nothing serious, you know. You can't be sorry for a girl and make love to her at the same time, can you?"

"I wouldn't know," said Charley.

"I'm afraid she has silly ideas about me—she thinks I am some sort of Sir Galahad; and now she wants to pick a fight with Jeff—with Miss Halden, I mean. Couldn't you divert her attention a bit? You are such a champion diverter!"

"I've had harder assignments," Charley decided after another look at Pat. "If you will see that Ann gets back to the *nonja* resident, I shall gladly take care of this attractive parcel of responsibility."

"Thanks, thanks a lot," Anders said, shaking Charley's hand with the murderous grip feared by all his friends.

Charley sauntered down the stairs and intercepted Pat, who, fortified with another drink, felt ready to go over and have a few words with That Girl.

"Excuse me for introducing myself," he said hastily and grabbed her arm, "I'm Charley Ellington, a friend of Andy's. I've been dying to meet you, but Andy knows that you are by far the most attractive young lady on this boat, and being a jealous and narrow-minded skunk, he has kept me away from you the whole evening. May I have this dance?" He took her in a firm grip and swerved her into the centre of the dance floor.

"Where is Mr Anderson now?" Pat asked, pleasantly impressed by his words.

"I've taken care of him; I tucked him away on the afterdeck with the notables of Sebang. I told him that it was his duty to dance with the *nonja* resident. Don't you think it serves him right? I say—do people tell you that you look very much like Ginger Rogers? Yes, you do indeed; when I saw you first I thought: Look here, there 'is Ginger Rogers on board the jolly old *Tjaldane* . . ."

Pat, a bit hazy in any case after the unhealthy mixture of champagne and whisky, found herself caught in a spider web of pleasantly pattering conversation and forgot for a few minutes her belligerent intentions. It gave Anders time to pull Jeff away from the danger zone on the main deck. Mynheer Van Halden, who was in the process of making a speech to the notables on the afterdeck, saw them disappear down the gangway and stopped for a moment to take a deep breath. His face had a waxlike smoothness, and his soft, thin white hair hung wilted down his forehead; his heart felt exhausted

after the excitements of this evening, there was an odd feeling of vacancy around this tired, overtaxed, refractory heart of his. But he delivered a speech as was expected from him and, being a lover of the adroit arrangement of words, he made a good job of it. ". . . wherever people live, there is the world," he was saying. "Life is exactly as full and complex and exciting on these peaceful, far-away shores as it is in the turmoil of any metropolis. Life consists of the same components, the same passions, the same pains and joys—everywhere."

Now they had reached the foot of the gangway and young Anderson beckoned to his boy. Mynheer Van Halden's hand went up to his heart in the aimless gesture which had become a habit with him.

"My friends, there are no small places in this world. The drop of water, seen through a microscope, is not small, though the whole globe may be small to the eye of some immeasurable higher being. Sometimes I like to think of God as a great inventor, each star in the universe a tiny experiment under His microscope . . ."

Now Josephine down there was stepping into young Anderson's car. Anderson went around the car and took his place next to her. . . . She smiled up at him. It was extraordinary how distinctly Van Halden saw that smile, or rather he knew it, he felt it. Now the car was started, turned into the narrow lane, disappeared. They want to be alone for their farewell, he thought, trying very hard to be tolerant and understanding.

"I don't know whether the little planet on which we are living is one of His successful experiments or one which He will discard after a brief time as a useless failure. Forgive me for dabbling in philosophy—the

climate of the Indies is conducive towards it, I suppose. What I wanted to say is that two different, two contrasting worlds have met tonight: the poised, never-changing, immobile world of this port—and the restless, ever-moving microcosm of this boat. Permit me to raise my glass to both of them, to our friends ashore and our friends aboard.”

Cheers, laughter, clinking of glasses, kissing, embracing, and general relief that the speech was over. The people of Sebang wondered what Mynheer Van Halden had wanted to express. The passengers of the *Tjaldane* felt partly flattered and partly bewildered.

“*Quel philosophe!*” said Madame Dufour.

“Maybe he’s drunk,” said George Carpenter.

Mrs Gould had no opinion; she was searching the boat for Pat, who had disappeared with a young man. Mrs Gould, who knew the world, tiptoed down to the corridor and along the doors of the staterooms; for a lady of her size, age and weight she was surprisingly nimble-footed. She stopped in front of the cabin which she shared with Pat. The door stood ajar, as did all the others, but the curtain was drawn inside. Mrs Gould listened and, sure enough, there were two voices talking, two young, excited voices.

“It’s easy for you to say that you get what you want if you want it hard enough. It’s easy for you to say I should go and get it. Just try and do such a thing!” That was Pat.

Then the man said calmly: “Do you know what you want? And is it worth fighting for?”

“Yes,” Pat said, “Yes. Yes, I know what I want just now. Goodness, do I know it!”

There was a brief silence, and then the man's voice said: "Good heavens, my lass, then take it—and hold on to it."

Mrs Gould waited for a few minutes, but there was only silence inside and then a muffled thud, as if Pat had jumped down from her upper berth. I'll go in and see what's going on, Mrs Gould thought. No, I won't go in, she thought after a second. Life had made her tolerant and had imbued her with a great deal of patience for human shortcoming and errors. "Am I my sister's keeper?" Mrs Gould thought and left the door.

Further down the corridor a sharp staccato tore into the humming quietness of these realms, as Miss Vanger fired away on her typewriter. She was trying to catch her adventure in words—suggestive, vivid, graphic words—which would retain the whole tense and exciting spirit of the event: ". . . suddenly I saw myself surrounded by a savage crowd of natives, their eyes blazing, their hoarse shouts tearing through the night, as they fought to free the Japanese spy. I saw the flashing of a kris, its snakelike blade was aimed at my throat—but I managed to keep my grip on the Japanese woman . . ."

The floor of the cabin was littered with crumpled, half-filled sheets of paper, and little clouds of cigarette smoke came bobbing through the door. Mrs Gould smiled tolerantly, tiptoed on and disappeared around the bend of the corridor. A little later the door of Pat's cabin opened and Charley peered out. He looked up and down the narrow passage, but there was no one. He beckoned into the cabin and held the door open for Pat. She had changed into a simple, short cotton frock and carried a small bag. Charley was loaded with two

suitcases. Their exodus was covered by all sorts of noises—the tramping and fiddling overhead, the machine-gun fire of Miss Vanger's typewriter, the buzzing of many ventilators. But as they tried to sneak by the open door of the salon, they were stopped by a young man who blocked their way.

"Excuse me," he said. "Aren't you Charles Ellington?"

"I can't deny it," Charley said humorously and attempted to get past the stranger.

"Sorry to trouble you, but I've been trying to speak to you all evening long, only you seemed very occupied. My name is George Carpenter. May I have a word with you?"

He looked uncomfortably at Pat, who was not exactly drunk but not exactly sober, either. "Come on, let's go, Charley," she said petulantly.

"It's about—about my brother," George Carpenter said hastily. "Seymour Carpenter, you know? Anderson advised me to talk to you. He seems to think that you were in or near Selagor, where my brother was seen last."

"Come on, Charley," Pat repeated impatiently. "You promised me—"

Charley put down her suitcases and deposited her in a chair in the empty salon. "D'you mind waiting a minute, Pat?" he said. "This is important. Shall we step into your cabin, Carpenter?"

The cabin was small and very neat. Anderson's luggage had been taken out, and on the upper berth the suitcases of a new passenger had been deposited; heavy, solid suitcases, bearing little labels with the name of a Siamese prince. There was a fresh, pleasant locker-room smell of young men, of toothpaste, rubbing alcohol, shaving

lotion, of Anderson's pipe and Carpenter's cigarettes.

"Smoke?" Charley said, offering him his own cigarette case and lighting another cigarette himself. Best thing to make it as short as possible, he thought.

"I'm sorry, Carpenter," he said. "There is no doubt that your brother crashed with his plane and died in the jungle north of Selagor. In fact, I sent a report to the governor about it all. It's more than three years, isn't it? But I remember everything quite clearly. You know, I was building a road in the interior, and it happened about five miles down Mulimbak River. The natives sent two of their *perahus* up the river to let me know that a giant fiery bird had swooped down near their village and that their priest had warned them not to go near the spot where it happened. I went back with them in their *perahu* and found the village in great excitement, as was only natural. I had quite some trouble to get any guide daring enough to show me the place where it happened. It was about half a mile off the river bed, near a clump of iron trees. The plane had caught fire when it crashed; everything was charred, quite a mess, Carpenter. But there is no doubt about what happened. There was nothing left to send along for identification. Sorry, old man, terribly sorry."

"Well—then that's that," said Carpenter, looking into the open palms of his big hands.

"It's a rotten shame a man like Carpenter had to end like that," Charley said. "But don't you believe it was the sort of end he would have chosen for himself had he been given a choice?"

Carpenter straightened up and smiled, the painful smile of a man hit and stunned. "I suppose so," he said. "I al-

ways hoped that he-- But if you saw the plane, then there is nothing to be done. D'you know, it's a funny feeling--like a vacuum, an empty spot, where I carried that load of fear and hope and all that with me--for more than three years. Well--thanks. Thanks, Ellington."

He turned abruptly and left the cabin. It's almost a relief, he thought as he went back on deck. This is finished and over. Now I can go and pick up my own life where I left off. Yes, to be certain is a relief. Now I can dance, thought George Carpenter, who for three years had roamed the islands in the hope of finding his brother alive.

Charley returned to Pat, who was brooding in her chair; he lifted up the two suitcases and propelled her through the door and towards the gangway. Just then two figures in white came up the bouncing planks, Dr Grader and Dr Maverick, followed by a smaller figure in a purple sarong and a jacket the colour of unripe apples: This was Sitah, carrying her master's satchel and keeping herself at a respectful distance. Pat gave a short gasp and pulled Charley behind some piece of gaudy decoration to let the little group pass by.

"What's the matter now?" he asked her, surprised.

"Nothing's the matter. I just didn't want to meet Dr Maverick just now," she said. "Boy, this certainly is something, almost like an elopement, isn't it? I wish I could get another drink before we go."

Charley wondered briefly if he had not taken a greater load upon his shoulders than he could carry, but decided with a grin and a sigh that this was exactly as it should be, and, clutching one suitcase under his arm, he used his free hand to keep a firm hold on Pat and trans-

port her down the gangway. "‘Never lose your cool head in a tight situation,’ Katharine Myrtle, page 243," he said, as he stepped on the rocking, swinging and bouncing planks.

Maverick and Grader had meanwhile arrived on the foredeck and made a beeline for the bar, while Sitah crouched down among the other *njais*. The dancing stopped for a brief intermission, and Madame Dufour took the centre of the floor for a relentless rendering of Carmen’s Habanera. The notables of Sebang, unused to artistic offerings of this sort, formed a circle around her and listened respectfully.

Ann Foster was the first one to notice Dr Grader’s late arrival, although the little group had made a most unobtrusive entrance. She fastened her eyes with a faint flicker of hatred on Sitah. The native girl, feeling her glance, clasped her hands and made a polite bow, as a flower might bow before a gust of wind.

"Do you think it’s good taste of the men to bring their housekeepers along?" Ann asked the *nonja* resident. "I am certain they wouldn’t dare to do it in Surabaya or Bandoeng."

The *nonja* resident cast a brief glance at the timid group of girls along the rail, who looked more like ornaments than like anything alive. "They are pretty," she said tolerantly.

"Yes. But they smell," Ann said. Dr Grader, balancing past her with a glass in his hand, stopped short.

"Isn’t it remarkable, Mrs Foster," he said, "that every race thinks the other race smells? Dutch noses don’t like Javanese smells, the Chinese will tell you that the white man stinks, the Japanese hold their noses when they meet

a Chinese, the Jew stinks in Germany and the Negro in the United States, and so on in a friendly circle. The fact is, however, and science has proven it, that we all stink, all of us, the whole blessed, carnivorous human race."

He stumbled on with his glass, and Vandengraaf, who sat next to Ann, gave a short, dry laugh. "What was the matter with him?" Ann asked baffled. "Is he drunk?"

"Overcompensated inferiority complex," Vandengraaf said. "Don't you know that he has Javanese blood? There are still some old people around who remember the marriage of his Dutch grandfather with a princess from the court of Jokyakarta. Half-breeds are always oversensitive. But you should not stare at that native girl, she is dangerous. Better to ignore her, Mrs Foster."

"Dangerous? What do you know about her?" Ann asked, disturbed.

"Probably more than you think, I happen to specialize in the breaking of *goona-goona* spells--and I recognize the secret marks which no one else would notice."

"I don't believe in *goona-goona*," Ann said weakly.

"If you are strong and courageous enough not to believe, you are lucky," Vandengraaf remarked, not looking at her but gazing as if into some unreality. He wanted to impress Ann, and he impressed her against her will. Vandengraaf employed the native witch doctors on all the islands as his agents, and from them he learned many secrets of the white people he wanted to know. Ann Foster was a potential prospect, and he hoped to sell her his hokus-pokus for a good price.

"Maybe I am mistaken," he said. "If everything in your life has taken a straight and smooth course, if there is no sickness in your family, if you do not have to worry

about the health of your dear ones or to mourn the loss of children—if you can tell me that you are happy and untroubled—then forget what I said, and forgive me for disturbing you with my dark superstitions. If not—”

“Yes? What then? What if not?” Ann asked quickly. Vandengraaf gave her a kind, consoling smile and put his hand over hers. It seemed to her that she could feel some vibrating strength flow from his fingers into hers, which were slack and without power. “Don’t look at the girl,” he said again.

Ann followed his glance, which wandered apparently without aim and yet with some deeper meaning down towards the pier. What she saw came as a short, sharp stab of surprise to her. For down there, surrounded by a chatting, laughing, teasing group of natives, was Charley, trying to start Minnie Mouse, who refused to be started. Charley had deserted her—Charley who, less than an hour ago, had told her that he loved her; Charley had bundled a girl into his ramshackle car, he laughed, he succeeded in getting Minnie Mouse started, he waved to the natives, put his arm around the girl’s shoulder and disappeared around the corner of the S.-B.-M. Line building. Ann heard the familiar coughing and spitting of Minnie Mouse fading away, and it hurt her to the depths of her heart.

“Well, there they go,” Vandengraaf said, more loquacious than was his habit. He clasped his magnetic fingers around Ann’s, and his touch seemed to blunt the sharp pains of her disappointment.

“Speaking of *goona-goona* . . .” Vandengraaf went on casually, “You may not believe in it. But there *are* all those cases which no doctor can heal or even explain or name, all those strange sicknesses, all those people going

out like a light, with no one able to help them. First they are only listless, tired, too tired to do anything. First only the soul becomes paralyzed; then the disease grips the body, too. Limb after limb refuses to do its duty. First the legs, then the arms, then speech fails them, and still they live on. You don't believe in it? Ask Mynheer Van Halden, he will tell you. His own wife lived and died like that."

For a dreadful second Ann felt herself becoming paralyzed, limb by limb. First they are only listless, tired, too tired to do anything, she thought. She tried to move her fingers and could not do it. She gasped, she felt like yelling for help. Then Vandengraaf let go of her hand, took a sip of champagne from his glass and added lightly: "And it is so easy to help, for one who knows how to break the spell."

Ann stretched her arms and wiggled her toes in the silver slippers. Yes, she could still move, she was still alive, though Vandengraaf had frightened her badly.

"Help? How?" she asked huskily.

"Oh—by different methods in different cases. Naturally, what they tell you about sympathetic cures is all nonsense. I am referring to all the burning or stabbing of images, the gathering and destroying of hair and nail substance—that, of course, is silly witchery. The usual *goona-goona* spell is worked by burying a certain number of little parcels containing the magic in and around the victim's home. My work is to find them all and to burn them. That is how I saved the oldest son of the Sultan of Surakarta, for instance. If only one of the parcels remains undiscovered, the spell does its sinister work. But I have the gift of finding them; I have to put

myself into something like a trance, and I have never failed yet to detect every parcel."

"I wish you could stay here for a while," Ann said impulsively.

She had taken the bait, Vandengraaf thought with satisfaction. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and dried his brow. Selling his goods was an exhausting task which used up a lot of personal magnetism; it's more strenuous than seducing a virgin, he thought cynically.

"My home is in Bandoeng," he said, "but I am always at the beck and call of people who need my help. I have the gift, and it is my duty to use it to the best interests of mankind," he said with boastful modesty.

Ann pondered over his answer. Maybe Charley would lend me enough money to send for this Mr Vandengraaf, she thought. No, Charley wouldn't. He would tease me and tell me that I have to fight. Only then she remembered that Charley had deserted her with some girl he had seen for the first time that evening. Men get like that in the jungles, she thought resignedly. Instinctively she looked down towards the wharf where Charley had taken his French leave a few minutes ago. Vandengraaf scribbled something on a card and handed it to her.

"My address in Bandoeng," he said. "I could take an airplane whenever you need me. But if you feel that you want to give me some of your time and your confidence tonight, we might establish some telepathic contact, we might begin to counteract the spell . . ."

Ann did not listen. Almost unconsciously she had perceived a familiar figure among the hundreds of natives on the quay. The night had wilted a bit, it was not so loud and not so gay as it had been for the last hours. The

moon too had disappeared from the firmament, and the *Tjaldane* was rocking in a gentle swell. It made Ann dizzy but she focussed her eyes bravely on the quay to find out who it was that had seemed familiar to her. Yes, it was her *babu*. Small and slim and lithe as if she were made of bamboo, she pushed her way through the crowd, which surged around her in tight little circles. Now she had reached the foot of the gangway, and now the boys down there refused to let her ascend to the boat. The *babu* was quarrelling, imploring, gesticulating. Ann forgot Mr Vandengraaf and the feast, she forgot even Charley. Her lips grew cold and stiff with sudden fear. She leaned over the rail and called: "*Babul Babul*" The *babu* did not hear her, she was still trying to obtain admittance to the gangway. Suddenly Ann saw two big, ugly rats scampering up the rope which held the *Tjaldane* to her mooring; they scampered as far as the ratguards which barred their way, and then they scampered back. Ann grabbed the rail; the rocking of the boat, the sight of the rats, the sudden appearance of her *babu*—it all mingled into a spell of dizzy nausea. Suddenly she remembered the *babu's* name and: "Dadong! Dadong!" she shouted.

The *babu* looked up and discovered her. "The *nonja* is begged to come home!" she called up to Ann.

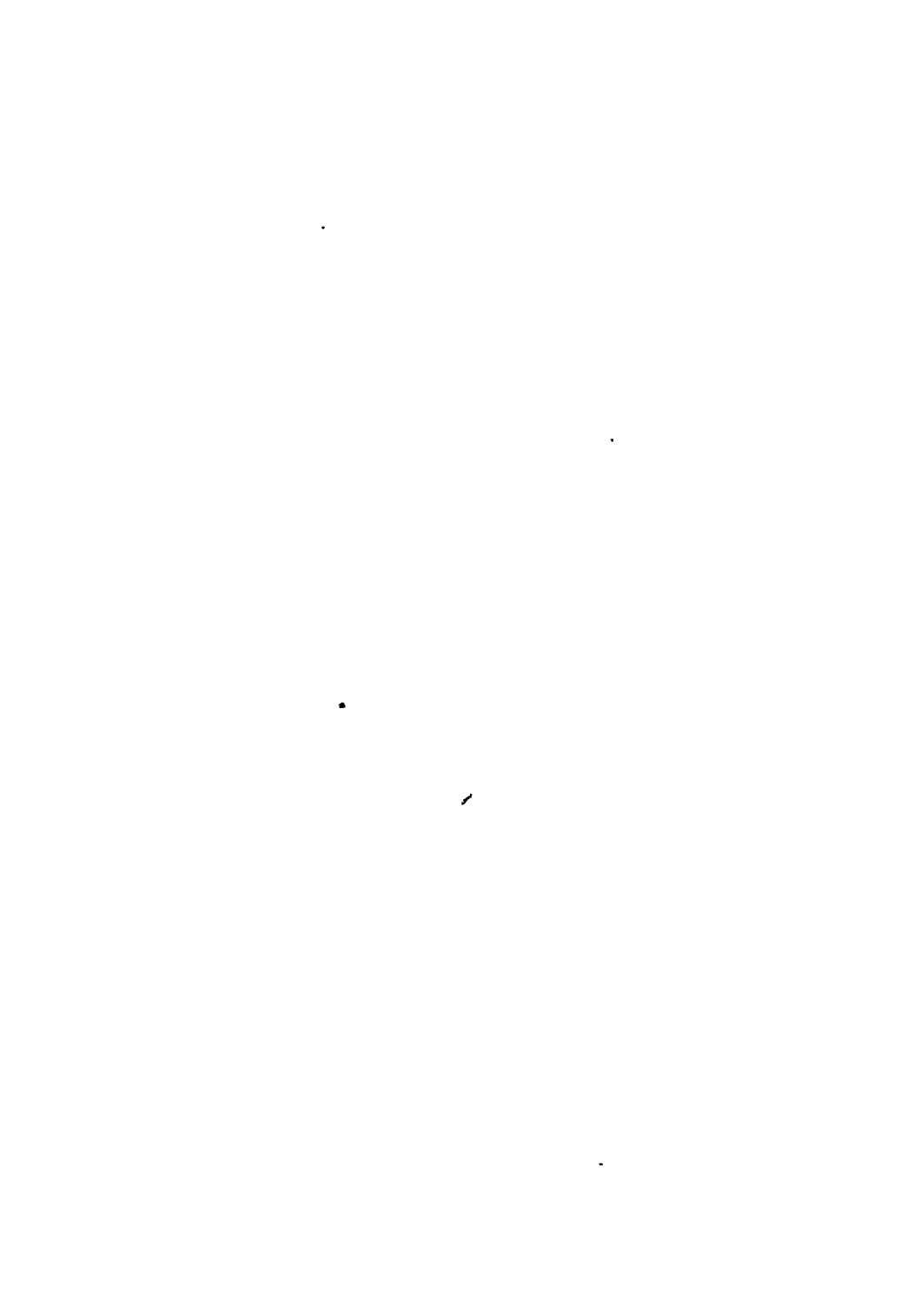
Ann bit her lips. "Has the *tuan* returned?" she called back.

"No, *nonja*. The *tuan* has not returned. But the little master, the little prince, has got the fever," the *babu* called.

I knew it, Ann thought. I knew it all the time. That's how it begins. That's how it ends. For a moment it was

as if little Jan were already dead and buried like her other two babies. The band played, the people danced, some were drunk and all were gay. Charley had left with a girl and she herself would die, limb by limb, sentenced and slowly executed by a *gonna-goona* spell. She straightened up, said, "Excuse me," and walked off.

Vandengraaf stared after her, whistling the second movement of Brahms's First Symphony. Nobody had heard the short exchange of calls or noticed Ann's leaving. Only, as she passed the crouching *njais*, it seemed to her as if Sitah's eyes would follow her, knowingly but without emotion, the fathomless, cruel eyes of a jungle animal.



The Plantation

TREES, TREES, TREES. They stood in endless, shadowy rows, they marched up towards the road, they stepped into the beam of light the car threw on the road and back into their darkness again. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of trees—and yet they formed no forest. They were too regimented, planted too regularly, there was something almost artificial about those thousands of Hevea trees. Each one of them had its own little post standing beside it with its own little pot hanging from its own little nail.

“Don’t they look like regiments of soldiers standing in line and waiting to get their food ration?” Jeff said after a long silence. From time to time a heavy, almost tangible smell of rubber wafted out of the darkness, grew

stronger, grew almost sickening intense until at last a barnlike structure appeared for a moment and was left behind: one of the coagulation plants. The smell clung for a while to their nostrils and then faded away reluctantly until the next barn announced itself by a new wave of the sweetish, sticky smell. Jeff creased her nose and held her breath, trying not to inhale too much of it. But to Anders this smell was home and work and satisfaction and fulfilment. "Now we're coming to my own section," he said, and Jeff could feel the muscles in his arm grow tense as he sat up and looked around with the sharp measuring glance of a hunter. To her his own section did not look any different from the other parts of the plantation through which they had driven for almost half an hour, ever since they had passed over the bridge across Kuri River and dived into the quiet monotony of the Hevea groves. There was no sound save the swish of air rushing past, the hum of their motor, and off and on the low, plaintive squeal of a night bird.

"Tell me more about your trees," Jeff said to Anders.

"It takes six years before they can be tapped for the first time—that is, we could start tapping after five years, and some plantations do it. But it's better for the trees to be patient—" Anders explained, at once wholly absorbed in his subject, but he stopped in the middle of the sentence. "I'm boring you," he said, embarrassed. "You must think me a complete fool, lecturing to you on the production of a rubber estate the last hour we are together."

They had not talked about themselves or their love since they had left the wharf in Anders' car. What her father had told her tonight stood like an invisible bar-

rier between Jeff and Anderson and kept her at a loss for words.

"Don't you know that I am the most curious creature on earth?" she said. "I want to know everything and to see everything and to go every place and stick my nose into every smelly corner of the globe. Every word you are telling me about these trees is an adventure to me. Besides, I like nothing better than to listen to a man talking about his work; I think my father must have trained me for it when I was a child."

"I hope your father isn't going to have me fired because of this secret ride," Anders tried a poor little joke.

"Oh no. Before we left the boat I told him that we were driving out to the plantation."

"You did?"

"Oh yes. It's no use trying to hide anything from my father. And I didn't want him to get worried over my disappearing act. His heart is not very sound, you know, and he gets easily excited of late."

"He must be a remarkable character. But he definitely doesn't look like my idea of the president of one of the greatest concerns in the world. You are very devoted to him, aren't you?"

"Don't let's talk so much about me and my father. Better tell me more about your Hevea trees," Jeff said uncomfortably.

But Anders had followed his own slow and persistent trend of thoughts. "It's one of the things which I don't know and can't even picture; what it is like to have a father. The memory of a dead father like mine is something to live up to, but I sometimes wonder what it means to have a living father. An asset or a liability?"

Jeff shrugged and smiled. "One and the other—at different times," she said lightly. "And you don't remember your father? How old were you when he died?"

"He was killed on a tiger hunt two days after my fifth birthday. I really should remember him much better, because I was a big boy then. But memory is a funny thing. For instance, I remember very clearly the old Chinese cook we had in Tanatua at that time. I also remember a little spear which one of the houseboys had carved for me. I remember how my mother locked herself in and cried. Somebody had brought me real oranges from the mountains for my birthday, and I took them in to my mother and said: 'I'll give you all my oranges, if you stop crying.' But I don't remember my father."

Jeff smiled at the vision of a little Anders trying to console his mother with his birthday oranges. The night had meanwhile filled with new noises, the croaking of frogs, the chirping and drilling of a million cicadas. The boy in front of them, driving the car with his broad, bare foot on the accelerator, leaned his head back, looking up to the narrow strip of starless sky between the trees and, without turning around, said something to Anders.

"What does he want?" asked Jeff, who with great zeal and ambition had begun to study Malay but did not yet understand the various dialects of the different islands.

"He says that it's thundering beyond the Great Mountain," Anders reported. "Either he is bragging or his ears are much better than mine."

But he too lifted his face and, with dilated nostrils, took in the scent of the night. "It's possible, though," he said. "There is something moist in the air. Strange how

six months of Europe blunt the senses. I suppose we live too loudly and too inattentively in the big cities. That's why we need barometers and thermometers and what not to convey to us the simple fundamental things which we are meant to perceive with our noses and eyes and ears."

He said something in Malay, and the boy gave a grunting laugh and drove a bit faster. "We'll be in Lombok soon," Anders said.

"We have time, oceans of time, haven't we?" Jeff answered, looking straight ahead. The army of trees marched on in front of them and stopped. There was a clearing and then a smaller grove began, where the trees were still not much better than saplings. "This would be the yearlings then?" Jeff said, boasting her newly acquired knowledge.

"It's so good of you to drive all the way out to Lombok and have a look at the place," Anders said after a while. "It makes my home coming so much nicer."

"Good-nothing! I am just being selfish. You know, darling, I have no imagination at all. I have to see the place where you live—it will make thinking of you so much easier. And when you write to me I shall at least know what you are talking about—" Jeff interrupted herself. "You will write once in a while, won't you, Andy?" she added, almost timid.

Anders glanced down at her and looked away again. He pulled her a bit closer into the shelter of his arm. It's no use to let her know how much I love her, he thought bitterly, it's no use. It'll make it only harder for her—and for me, too.

"Yes, I'll write and you will answer me—at first at

least," he said, surprised at how hard and casual he could make it sound. "Maybe you don't know how it goes with shipboard acquaintances. You meet and you are together for three weeks and you get very close and when you part it cuts like a knife. Then you write, first every week and then every month, and then you send a cable for Easter and one for Christmas. And after half a year there is hardly anything you have to write to each other. You have your life and I have mine. You are a pampered, spoiled, worldly young lady, the daughter of Mynheer Van Halden. And I am the youngest inspector in Lombok and all I know is rubber and all I dream and think and want is rubber. You will soon get pretty tired of my letters, Jeff. And after two years you will send me, not a letter, but a nicely engraved announcement of your marriage to some swanky young gentleman somewhere in The Hague or in South Carolina. But the announcement will go back to you, with the stamp 'Addressee unknown' on the envelope, because meanwhile I'll either have gone on to some other rubber plantation or I'll have died from blood poisoning after one of my coolies has stabbed me with his rice knife, like my best friend who died last year. Or I'll be 'inside a tiger' as the famous Limerick goes. Or—"

"Now you are dramatizing yourself, Andy," said Jeff.

"My father died like that—why not I?" Anders said curtly, and Jeff was silenced.

"You sound like a different man since you set your foot on this shore," she said finally. "What made you change so?"

Anders answered not right away but thought out his answer carefully. He was a decent sort of fellow, and he

felt almost guilty for having let this thing go too far. He wanted to make their parting easier for her; he could not bear the thought of a Jeff who would be pining away for him, his gay, vivacious, plucky Jeff sad and lonely and mourning over a lost love. "Let's be sensible, darling," he said as dryly as he could manage. "Let's put everything back into the right proportions, Jeff. We've had three wonderful weeks, something to remember, something to cherish. But don't let's drag it on after we've parted. Let's keep it a happy memory, but don't let love hurt you, Jeff."

"If it doesn't hurt, it's not love," answered Jeff, who had grown up during this one night and had become wise beyond her young years. Anders cupped his hand around her face and pressed it to his shoulder, and they drove on in a heavy silence which was broken only by the very faint, very distant murmur of thunder.

"Here we are now," Anders said after an eternity, and the rows of trees fell back behind them and gave way to a vast clearing, overhung by the low and clouded sky. The shapes of buildings loomed dark ahead in the luminous air, and the croaking of frogs grew louder. A few natives crossed the road like gliding shadows, darker than the darkness. The car passed a pond or lake in which a few sparks of small oil lamps were mirrored, and then Jeff recognized the smell of a native kampong. Furiously barking dogs shot out from nowhere, almost running into the car, and the boy muttered some curses against them and their ancestors.

"A kampong?" Jeff asked, feeling almost familiar by now with the smell, the noise, the sight of the stilted huts. The short but crowded hours of this evening had

taken away much of the strangeness of this strange world.

"Yes, one of the kampongs of our coolies," Anders explained. "There are six in all on the Estate. Don't they smell to heaven?"

Jeff smiled into the darkness. "Still another smell we have to add to our sweet memories," she said. "If I have the choice I prefer it to chicken feet."

The car circled around the still expanse of water, and Jeff tried in vain to see what the vague shapes beyond the beam of the headlights might be. She discerned piles of boards and posts and the fresh scent of a lumberyard.

"That's where we are going to build a powerhouse," Anders said, following the direction of her glance. He gave a short laugh. "I thought it would be ready by my return, but it doesn't even seem to have got started," he said. "Planters are slow and conservative. We have lots of time, and meanwhile we are struggling on with our poor Japanese kerosene lamps—for what was good enough for the Oost-Indische-Compagnie must be good enough for us, too."

The air grew cooler; they had left the kampong behind and drove between two sparse rows of trees, not Hevea trees but something that looked like an attempt to plant a garden. At the same time there came a new smell, carried by a cool gust of wind from the darker hills beyond the clearing.

"It smells like a fire," muttered Jeff.

"Yes, we have to burn down the jungle in sections before we can plant," Anders said indifferently. His attention was not with Jeff at this moment but somewhere else. The boy too lifted his head and seemed to

listen intently to the sound of the tomtom which penetrated at short intervals the wall of darkness.

"Why would they call a meeting in the middle of the night?" Anders said in Danish. The boy turned around and answered something in Malay.

"Is anything the matter?" Jeff asked, reading from the startled expression on their faces what she could not understand from their words.

"No, no, it's nothing," Anders said absent-mindedly. He said it so absent-mindedly and seemed so unaware of her presence that Jeff for a sharp, biting second was sorry she had ever asked him to show her Lombok.

Suddenly the brakes screeched and the boy stopped the car so abruptly that Jeff was jolted from Anders' side. They had caught up with a slowly advancing wall of silent people moving close in front of the car. Jeff could see the last of them quite clearly in the beam of lights. There were women among them, and children, too. Some of the women carried their babies slung into the cloth on their backs. The men were farther ahead; they turned around and squinted into the harsh light, and the high cheekbones and protruding mouths of their race gave them a savage look. The boy yelled wildly at them, but they did not heed him, they turned slowly away again and moved on in a dense, entirely soundless cluster of bodies. Anders stood up in the open car and called a sharp command to them. This time they did not turn around, but reluctantly and without a word the wall of their dark masses opened and formed a narrow path for the car to pass. Anders sat down again, took out his unfilled pipe and clamped it cold between his teeth. It was a nervous gesture; he collected himself and put the

pipe back into his pocket with an apologetic smile. "The fools!" he said. "If one of them gets run over there will be wailing and weeping for forty-two days."

They had left the bumpy, unpaved road by now and reached the centre of the plantation, with gravel crunching beneath the wheels. The road was flanked on both sides by rows of little bungalows, built on the pattern that Jeff had seen in Sebang, only smaller and less elaborate. They had whitewashed walls and a gallery of dark wood, and here and there they showed even a sketchy effort at planting a few flowers in front. Most of them were dark inside, but a burning kerosene lamp swung sleepily in some of the galleries, and at the end of the little street more lamps were strung on wires across the street. Where the street ended it ran into a small, paved square, and there stood a bigger house, low and squat, with a bigger gallery in front, but otherwise without any embellishments. This was the seat of the management of the Lombok Estate.

"Well, this is where I live," Anders said in response to Jeff's glance which travelled over the scant lights. "This is what is known as Section Three of the Estate. It's makeshift, because every few years we move the whole settlement farther into the interior, you understand. We eat our way into the jungle and settle down where we are working."

While he spoke to her, his glance shifted uneasily over the silent crowd of coolies which had gathered in front of the office bungalow. They had squatted down on the ground as if ready to spend the night there, while new groups silently came out of nowhere and silently settled down on the ground with the others. It looked as if the

darkness of the night would spill over and leave this silent puddle of humanity in front of the Lombok office. The sparks of a few flashlights and the smaller glowing tips of native cigarettes bobbed up and disappeared again. As if for a theatrical performance on their village square, the smallest children and the women with babies were seated in front, closest to the bungalow, with the boys and men in a half-circle behind them.

"What is it? Are they having a celebration?" Jeff whispered to Anders.

"I wonder," he answered vaguely.

The car stopped. Now Jeff could discern some Chinese among the crowd and a few white men, obviously officials of the plantation, standing here and there, smoking cigarettes and doing nothing. "There is the *tuan besar*," said Anders and jumped out of the car. "I must report to him. Wait—I think it would be better if you came along with me," he added after a second's pondering and helped Jeff from the car.

Jan Foster had just stepped out from the office; he stood big and massive in the door, darkly outlined against the brighter room behind him. Anders took Jeff's elbow and steered her, not through the crowd of coolies, but around them. For one moment she realized how strange it was that she, Jeff Halden, was standing in the centre of a plantation deep in the interior of some strange island, on her arm the hand of a man whom she had not known a few weeks ago, whom she did not really know yet and who did not want to be hurt by love. She thought of her grandfather in Bunker Hall, where everything was so settled, so safe, so conservative. He would be reading the afternoon paper now, would grumble against the govern-

ment, would turn on the radio but would not listen to it. It was long past midnight in Lombok, but it might well be early in the afternoon in Bunker Hall. Jeff had a hazy feeling that she had stepped out of all boundaries of her sheltered life, that even time was something strange and different in Lombok. There was something like danger in the air; she felt it with a cold, prickling sensation at the roots of her hair, though she could not define it. In the meantime they had reached the steps which led up to the gallery of the office—wide, slightly creaking steps. Anders walked up to Jan Foster, though he did not let go of her hand, and Jeff remained at the foot of the steps.

"Inspector Anders Anderson reporting back to work, sir," he said with mock military promptness and indicating a salute.

"Thank God you're here, Anderson," Foster said without any ceremony, as if Anderson had been absent, not for six months, but just for half an hour. "I am a bit short of men; these fools of assistants have run off to get themselves drunk on the *Tjaldane* and left me alone with this mess."

"Anything the matter? Complaints about the co-operative store again?" Anders asked, for this had been the current trouble before he went on leave.

"No. The coolies in Kampong 3 haven't cleared their houses in time, and the new coolies clamour for a place to sleep but refuse to help throw out the old coolies. I have called the *mandoers* for a palaver. *Godverdomme*, it's getting harder and harder to handle the coolies. When I was a young dog—"

He had been too absorbed in his troubles to discover Jeff at the foot of the steps until now; his mouth fell open

in a stupid expression of surprise and he bowed three times, clumsily and embarrassed.

"This is Miss Halden," Anderson introduced. "Miss Halden, may I present to you our *tuan besar*, Mr Foster—the chief manager and lord over Lombok—"

"Miss Halden! This is what I call a surprise! I had the pleasure—the honour—in Amsterdam, you remember? Mynheer Van Halden was kind enough to invite me for dinner—"

"Certainly," said Jeff, who remembered nothing. "How are you, Mr Foster?"

"Miss Halden asked me to show her a bit of the Estate—she is quite interested in rubber," Anders explained, giving Jeff a wink.

"Naturally, naturally, Miss Halden. Too bad you can't stay longer, I'm afraid you can't see much at night. And the moon has gone too—I hope we won't have rain. And your dear father, Miss Halden—is he coming to look at the plantation, too?"

"I don't think so—although you can never be sure what my father will do. He likes surprises, Mr Foster."

"I'll say he does!" muttered Foster, cursing this idiot Anderson who had brought the boss's daughter to the plantation explicitly to give her a good demonstration of disorder and rebellion among the coolies. "What do you want to see first?" Would you like to come into the office? Can we offer you some beer? It will be on the warmish side—all our ice has melted. But as soon as we get the power plant we'll have American refrigerators. Maybe it would interest you to see the plans of the power plant?"

"Later, maybe, Mr Foster. What I would really like to see is one of the kampongs. I'd like to know how the

coolies live and sleep and eat and all that. I'm dying to crawl up one of those little ladders and peep inside a hut. They don't seem to be asleep now anyhow—probably they would not mind my intruding."

Foster gave an unwilling snort at the idea that coolies should mind anything at all. However, he himself minded very much Miss Halden's unwanted intrusion. "I would not advise you to do that," he said waveringly. "I could not take the responsibility. There is a lot of malaria in the kampongs, and where there is malaria any mosquito bite is dangerous. Anderson, you will know best what to show Miss Halden."

A tall, bony Chinese appeared in the doorframe and spoke a few clipped, nasal words to Foster. The heavy man reeled around and retorted in a quick staccato patter of Malay. The dark cowering group down in the small square stirred and moved. Anders touched Jeff's arm. "Come, darling, let's go," he said gently. "*The tuan besar* has important decisions to make just now."

"You know, it is not true that all Chinese look alike," Jeff said as they went back to the car. "For instance, that was the Chinese from the boat, the one who just spoke to Foster. Fong is his name, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know, Jeff darling," Anders said, surprised. "You are a remarkable girl. You remember names and faces which don't mean a thing to you."

"But they do mean something to me," she said, lifting her eager face to him. "I like people, that's all, I suppose. You like your Hevea trees. I am certain you know every one of them by name."

"Almost," he said, smiling. He thought: Tomorrow it won't seem true that you were here with me, that you

really touched the handrail of this gallery, that your little feet really walked across this path.

Jeff stopped as she discovered more of her friends from the *Tjaldane*. "Look," she said. "There's Ahmet."

"Who in heaven is Ahmet?"

"Don't you remember him? The shy little Javanese whose baby had a three days' fever? *Apa kabar, Ahmet?*"

Ahmet folded his hands, grinning and bowing: "*Kabar baik,*" he repeated over and over again, "*kabar baik, Nonja, kabar baik.*" It was only a polite formula and not the truth, because he felt anything but good. His innards were cold with fear and evil premonitions, but the friendly greeting of the white *nonja* made him happy and gave him great distinction among the other coolies.

"How is your little son, Ahmet?" Jeff asked, and now she left Anders standing at the outskirts of the squatting crowd and stepped among them to bend over the sleeping little boy in the arms of Ahmet's old father and to touch his warm little head. I hope you will be happy in this new home, was what she wanted to tell the frightened coolie. But as her Malay was insufficient, all she knew to say was: "*Slamat-slamat datang*—peace on your coming." She had the satisfaction of seeing a smile appear on the little man's face which made all the words unnecessary and went the direct way from heart to heart.

When she returned to Anders, he had his cold pipe again between his teeth. "It's getting late," he said nervously. "You should not stay too long. The weather might change and your father might be worried."

"You don't want to get rid of me, do you?" Jeff said teasingly, but he remained serious.

"Listen, Jeff darling," he said, uneasy. "It is just

possible that I may have to send you back to town with my boy—I mean, it might happen that I could not bring you back. Would you mind very much?"

She stared at him unbelievably. "That's a very poor joke," she said.

"You heard what Foster said—he might need me here. He is my boss, after all—and my vacation days are over."

Jeff laughed, relieved. "Let *me* take care of the *tuan besar*," she said cheerfully. "He won't refuse to do my father's daughter a favour, if I know anything about men."

"Well—we'll see," Anders replied, still biting on his cold pipe, still uncomfortable. They had arrived at the car, which the boy had parked in front of the third bungalow in the row. The headlights were turned off, the car seemed asleep and the boy had disappeared. Jeff stopped.

"Is this your bungalow?" she asked.

"Yes, that's it," Anders said.

"There is a light inside."

"Wonders and miracles!" said Anders. "Turut has not forgotten to fill the lamp."

Turut, the boy, appeared on the gallery, carrying the lighted lamp and putting it on the small table that stood there. Then he gave his master a fleeting smile of male conspiracy and, folding his hands, came down the steps and melted into the darkness outside. The small glimmer of the lamp lifted into the light some clumps of dry grass sod which took the place of a front lawn, and Jeff said: "Why don't you have flowers in your little garden?"

"I don't know. Maybe because I'm not Dutch. Or maybe because I have no *babu* and no *njai*. Turut and the water boy don't seem to be geniuses of horticulture."

Jeff felt an odd joy surge up inside her as she pictured the hundred-per-cent male household of Anders. "How little I know about you!" she said. "How difficult it is to be in love with a stranger!"

She waited, but Anders had nothing to say. "Won't you invite me into your house?" she said finally. He hesitated for a moment. "Or is it dangerous, as the *tuan besar* thinks the houses of the coolies are?" she asked slowly.

"More so," he answered huskily. She shot a quick glance at him, questioning and yet trustful, and went up the three steps to the gallery. He took her hand and opened the door into the house, carrying the lamp inside. Then she stood motionless, and looked around the room which was neat and barren, with whitewashed walls, no carpet, no mat on the floor, with a few pieces of bamboo furniture and a small bookshelf. It was a completely impersonal room, furnished for barest necessity. Jeff felt an odd pity for Anders as she looked at this room, and she loved him the more for it.

"Will you sit down so that you don't carry my sleep away, as they say in Denmark?" he invited her, nervously pushing his three chairs around. "I am afraid there won't be anything in the house to offer you."

Jeff did not sit down and she did not answer. She waited for him to come to her and take her in his arms. She wondered why he seemed so uneasy, so nervous, so distracted, so unresponsive. As he did not come to her, she went over to him. Now she too could hear the distant thunder. A faint flash of lightning brightened for a moment the bamboo blinds which were drawn close. All this was strange, as in a dream.

"Andy," she whispered.

"Yes, Jeff," he said breathlessly.

The next moment Jeff was in Anders' arms, in an embrace for which she had been yearning all evening long. He whispered into her hair, but it was all Danish, soft and childish sounds of tenderness. Another flash of lightning, so bright that it pierced Jeff's closed eyelids. Distant thunder. Strange, strange, alien night. She opened her eyes and let her fingertips glide over Anders' temples. Two tiny lizards sat pressed to the white wall, motionless, like fine ornaments.

Something stirred in the dark room adjoining, and the two lizards hastily glided away. Anders had heard it, too. He opened his eyes, released Jeff from his arms and came slowly, dizzily, parachuting down from the heavens where he had been floating during the last few moments. He straightened up and listened. Yes, there was somebody stirring in his bedroom.

"Excuse me, please," he said to Jeff. He had to clear his throat and repeat it, because his throat and lips had gone dry in the turmoil of emotions: "Excuse me, please."

He left the lamp on the table but took a flashlight from his pocket and went through the door, which he left open. His bedroom, which he had not seen for six months, smelt of perfume. He directed his flashlight towards his bed and held his breath; the mosquito net was neatly tucked in and something moved behind the white meshwork—an arm, a shock of bright hair, a slender neck. He bit hard on the stem of his pipe.

"Don't be frightened. It's only me," said Pat Houston.

II

ANDERS' GASP of angry amazement brought Jeff from the outer room and to his side. She might have believed him in danger, for she was blazing with pluck and determination as she took her stand next to him. A moment too late she realized the cause of his alarm and stood petrified. The world came crashing down about her, the sweet, nostalgic world of their brief romance. She stared at the apparition in Anders' bed; ruffled bleached hair, drowsy eyes, the dress which clung in sloppy, moist wrinkles to Pat's body, the lipstick which had left blobs of red on Anders' pillow. Pat, on the other hand, was no less surprised to encounter ThatGirl in this place, in Mr Anderson's bedroom, and at this hour, long past midnight. Thus a few seconds passed with the two young women staring at each other as if hypnotized, unable to utter a single word. Then Jeff turned on her heels with a stifled sound, a sob or a curse, and left the room. Anders remained only long enough to hiss at Pat: "What in hell are you doing here? Are you crazy? Get out at once—please!" Then he rushed out after Jeff, who was gathering her white cotton gloves and handbag from the table where she had dropped them. The kerosene lamp had begun to smudge.

"Do you mind calling Turut with the car? I wish to be driven to the boat," Jeff said, trying to keep control of herself. Her fists were clenched, she was shaking with

disgust and rage. Anders took her arm and she shook him off, furious, blind with anger and hurt.

"But Jeff, believe me, this is a misunderstanding, a ridiculous, idiotic mistake," Anders said wretchedly.

"Obviously a mistake. My mistake to intrude on you. My mistake to drive out here with you. A ridiculous, idiotic mistake of me to be so dense. I'm sorry. If you had given me the least indication of your tender relation to Miss Houston you could have saved all three of us this situation," Jeff said. She was only a girl of nineteen. She had no experience, but she tried her best to behave as she imagined an experienced woman would have behaved under the same, outrageous circumstances. But the pain inside her broke open like an infected sore, and against her will she burst out: "You didn't have to lie to me. You didn't have to pretend all the things you pretended. You didn't have to make a fool of me. Why did you do it, why? I know why—because I am my father's daughter, is that it? You're ambitious, you told me so yourself. I'm afraid you're just a bit too ambitious. You wanted to use me to make a quicker career? Well, you didn't choose the best way and not a very subtle one, either. Go, don't touch me, I hate you—God, do I hate you!"

Anders turned very white; he jerked her back as she went to the door and, strangely enough, the stab of pain which shot through her with this rude jolt was almost a relief.

"Listen to me," he said hoarsely. "Jeff, listen to me. will you believe me if I give you my word of honour that I had not the faintest idea of—of Miss Houston's presence here? That I have not the faintest idea why

and how she could ever have come here? I haven't given you any reason to distrust my word so far, have I? You must at least give me a fair chance to clarify matters—that's all I want from you right now."

Jeff's mind was a dizzy whirl of clashing emotions and thoughts. This was Anders and she loved him and he didn't look like a liar and she wanted to be able to believe him. But he was his father's son and image, and his father had cheated and lied and she had been warned not to trust Andy. He had seemed embarrassed and uneasy when she asked him to invite her into his bungalow. He had made slight of their romance and had refused to marry her. He had danced with this Miss Houston, he had even, before Jeff's very eyes, been embraced and kissed by this same Miss Houston, who was now lying in his bed. And yet, there he stood before her, tall and lank and looking as honest and straight and transparent as a crystal. She tore herself away from him to reach the door.

"I don't want to argue, I don't want to speak another word with you," she said weakly. "Let me go! Call for Turut!"

He was quicker than she, he had locked the door and put the key into his pocket before she could press down the handle. "You'll go when I let you go, not sooner," he said, blazing with anger. This was more than Jeff Halden could bear. Before she knew what she was doing she had slapped his face good and hard. Pat, who had meanwhile gathered herself up, struggling with the mosquito net and putting on her slippers, appeared from the bedroom just in time to witness the slap. It outraged her sense of justice and her reverence for Mr Anderson.

"Hey you," she screamed. "Cut it out, will you?"

What's the idea, hitting a gentleman? He can't hit you back, can he? Okay. If you want a fight you'll have to fight it out with me."

Jeff reeled around and stared at Pat. Pat did not look very neat, nor very refined. Neither did Jeff, for that matter. Her hair too was ruffled after the drive in the open car, her eyes too had a strange glitter, her blouse too had slipped from her belt in the tussle with Anders. The only difference was that Pat was swaying in a little cloud mixed of champagne, whisky and sleepiness, and Jeff was not.

Fight? With you? Who are you that I should fight with you? Jeff's disgusted and spiteful glances said so clearly that Pat seemed to hear the very words.

"Oh, so you think you are too good to have it out with me?" she shouted. "But you're not too good to visit a gentleman in his house late at night. You want to be a lady, do you? Nice sort of a lady *you* are, you stuck-up, rich so-and-so—"

"Don't listen to her, she's drunk," Anders said desperately.

"You're drunk," Jeff said and backed away as if Pat's breath were poisoned.

"So I'm drunk," Pat said, steadying herself on the door-frame. "Okay, so I'm drunk. So what are you going to do about it? But I'm not drunk, Mr Anderson, honest, I'm not. If I had stayed stone sober I'd never have had enough pluck to come here, see? Charley said the only way to get what you want is to go after it. But to go after things you need a few drinks, don't you? Well, I do, in any event. So when Charley said he would take me to your plantation and it would be a nice surprise for you and

gave me a few drinks to cheer me up and to counteract the dragging climate—”

Something dawned on Anders. “Was it Charley who persuaded you to come here? Did he fill you up with liquor and drive you out to Lombok?” he asked.

“Yessir, that’s what he did. There’s a real friend, Mr Anderson—he’s as fond of you as if you was his own brother; he told me so hisself.”

Damn Charley, Anders thought fervently. I’ll beat some sense into his crazy head! This was worse than the time when Charley had left two grown-up untamed gibbons in the bungalow, as a little attention. It was much worse, infinitely worse, it was the worst service Charley could have cooked up in his well-meaning, befuddled brain.

“Look here, Pat,” he said, trying to sound patient. “If Charley brought you out here he’ll have to take you back to the boat also, and at once. I’m really not in the mood for jokes of this kind.”

“Jokes?” Pat said miserably.

“Yes, Pat. Can’t you see this is a very stupid, very crude practical joke? Now straighten yourself up a bit and I’ll have my boy look around for Charley.”

“He’s gone,” Pat said sullenly. “He said he had to go back to his camp in a hurry, because a storm was coming. He said you’d be glad to have me stay here and look after you. I brought a few things along, you see. I don’t want to go back to the boat. I don’t want to go back to Azusa. To hell with Azusa, I’ve changed my mind anyway.”

Jeff listened to their dialogue with tense attention. She tried to find the truth behind their exchange of words. It was barely possible that Anders had not lied to her

after all. The knot of pain and jealousy and humiliation within her began to loosen up a bit. Anders turned to her with the pleading look of a puppy who has chewed up the best oriental rug.

"Jeff," he said, "this is horrible. But you have a good sense of humour. Can't you possibly make yourself see the funny side of it?"

"Would you mind going into the other room and closing the door, Anders?" she said. "I'd like to have a few words with Miss Houston alone."

Anders opened his mouth and closed it again. He looked from her to Pat and back. He sighed deeply, he hesitated; and finally he went into the other room as told and closed the door. Pat, robbed of the support of the doorframe, leaned against the wall, putting her hands to her hips as she used to do for a brawl at the Nirvana.

"Well, shoot," she said grumpily.

"I want to know only one thing from you," Jeff said. "And I beg you, I beg you, Miss Houston, to tell me the truth: Did Anders know you were coming here? I mean—did he invite you? Did he want you to stay with him?"

Pat studied Jeff's intense, anxious face. How I could hurt you now! she thought; how I could pay back to you everything you've done to me! If ever the temptation to do something dishonest was great in Pat's much-tempted life, this was the time.

"What if he did?" she said.

It was strange that these four words convinced Jeff all of a sudden of Anders' innocence. Maybe Pat was a poor liar; and maybe Jeff had an instinct to sense the truth even if it was in disguise.

"You're lying," she said, almost gently, no longer

furious. "Why should I believe you and not him? Anders isn't lying."

"You said it," Pat said after a moment's hesitation, and she said it very softly. "He isn't lying. He didn't invite me and he didn't know I was coming. I done it all on my own account. I followed him onto the *Tjaldane*, and I followed him here on the plantation. I'd follow him to the four ends of the world, if you must know, because I love him."

Jeff had been brought up with very firm ideas of what a young girl could do and what she couldn't do. To run after a man was one of the strictest taboos in her code of honour, and somehow Pat's bad grammar made the picture complete.

"You should be ashamed of yourself," she said, unmoved by Pat's pathetic admission. "Running after a man who doesn't care for you! Making a nuisance of yourself, getting him in trouble, creeping into his bed when you're drunk—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Pat called out. "You ain't the one to give me a sermon. What do you mean, running after him? You're running after him yourself, ain't you? Or what are you doing here in the middle of the night? How do you know he doesn't care for me? Maybe he cares for me more than for you! There are many ways a man cares for a girl, and I'm sure of one thing, that I'm of more use to Mr Anderson than you are."

"Leave me out of this. With me and Anders that's something different."

"I'll say it's different!" Pat cried. "I'll say it is! You never had to fend and fight and struggle for yourself, you

never fell into a sewer with no one to pull you out again. You're the last one in the world to tell me what's right and wrong. You haven't a care in the world, you're just sitting on your money bags and if you want something you tell your papa: 'Buy me this and buy me that.' So now you've bawled: 'Papa, buy me that nice Mr Anderson, I want him for my collection, I need another beau,' and your papa, the old ass, goes out and buys him for you. That's all the difference between us, see? You have to pay cash for every nice word he ever said to you. But he spent more than two hundred dollars just to have me for company, and that's one sure sign that he cares for me, see? You may have a pretty swell place in the social register, but if you should try to earn only one nickel with your face and your figure and your snooty ways, you wouldn't get very far, you pampered, spoiled brat . . ."

There was not much Jeff heard or saw after this, except a buzzing and roaring in her head and a kaleidoscope of red, revolving wheels. She felt herself getting very light, like a swollen, soaring red balloon, ready to burst. It soared, it burst, it exploded.

When Anders opened the door, worried by the strange scuffling noises and shrieks which had followed the first exchange of invectives, he found Pat and Jeff on the floor, fighting.

"Pat!" he called, flabbergasted. "Stop it! Jeff! Stop it, Pat! Girls, are you crazy?"

Without much success he dived into the tangle of female limbs on the floor. He grabbed soft flesh and skin, flying hair, ripping dresses. He got up, shook himself, screwed up the smudging lamp, left the room and returned soon with a jug of water. Very casually and de-

liberately he doused the two fighting females; they let go of each other, sat up and blinked. Pat, not entirely inexperienced in fights of this sort, found her composure first.

"I'm sorry, Mr Anderson," she panted. "She called me names and I'm every inch as much a lady as she is."

Anders helped Jeff to her feet and patted her hair back. She was bleeding from a little scratch on her chin, while Pat was rubbing her arm with the mark of Jeff's teeth on it. Jeff felt much better after the fight—oh, much, much better. She had given vent to a lot of pent-up emotions; now she felt almost kindly towards Pat. "I don't know how it happened, Anders," she said, and her old smile stole into her face.

"Have you decided whether I spoke the truth?" he asked with a grin.

"Almost," she answered.

Pat was left out of the conversation as usual. "How'll I get back to the boat now?" she asked, and this was her acknowledgement of Jeff's victory.

Suddenly Anders lifted his head and listened. During the last ten minutes they had all completely forgotten where they were, all about the strangely silent crowd of coolies outside, squatting in front of the office. However, there had been an ever-growing buzz of voices, a steady murmur, monotonously rising and falling, rising and falling. Now this steady din of the native crowd had swollen into a clamour, pierced by sudden cries. Then all this was drowned out by the rumbling of thunder, much louder, much closer than before. Then a second of silence. Then again the cries. Then a long-drawn wail in front of the window, like a howling storm which rocked the bungalow.

With one leap Anders was at the table and turned out the lamp; he pushed the girls deeper into the room and unlocked the door. "Get out the back way, through my bedroom and the bathhouse," he whispered. "I'll send the car around. Jeff, take Pat with you, will you?"

She nodded in the dark. But Pat held onto him, whispering and trembling. "My God, just listen! What's that, Mr Anderson? I'm scared. I'm scared. Don't go away, please, don't."

He unfastened the grip of her hands, opened the door to a narrow slit and stepped out onto the gallery. A new wave of cries rose at the same moment. Jeff stood motionless for a second, thinking very hard. There was the danger which she had felt overhanging this whole evening like a blurred cloud. Once more a vision of the peace and security of Bunker Hall flashed through her mind. She felt Pat's moist and trembling hand groping for her own and holding onto it. It gave her a strange, almost triumphant feeling of being strong and valiant. She bit her lips. Not for the world would she have gone out the back way. She had to be where Anders was. She opened the door, but she felt the whole weight of Pat pulling her back. "For God's sake, don't go out, don't leave me alone," Pat whispered in the dark. Jeff, without answering her, stepped out onto the gallery, trying to shake off Pat. The girl, though, too frightened to stay alone in the dark room with the howling crowd in front, did not release her grip but let herself be dragged along.

The entire space between the two rows of bungalows was now filled with coolies, with a milling churning mass of agitated bodies, of waving, demanding hands, of bared white teeth in dark faces, of stamping, tramping, broad

bare feet on the gravel. There was a flickering brightness, for the crowd had lighted something like a bonfire, a giant torch of husks and dry palm leaves, at one end of the square. Here and there the Chinese *mandoers* pushed their way through the densely packed people, yelling at them, apparently without even being heard or understood. The entire crowd was steadily moving forward, pressing against those who were in front, surging like a tidal wave up the steps to the office. Jeff, who had been trained by her father to be observant, noticed with one glance the basic change in their grouping. Now the children and women formed the rear, while the men had lined up in front of them like an angry, demanding wall.

"What do they want?" Jeff asked Anders in a whisper. He shrugged, a deep frown on his forehead. She saw it in the brief flare of a match as he lighted his pipe. "Are they dangerous?" she asked.

"No, but they are ticklish to handle," he answered over his shoulder. "We have to watch our step."

Jeff searched the crowd for some of the soft, timid, gentle faces she had got to know on the boat; it seemed to her that if she could only have stepped between them, called them by their names, addressed them as friends, asked them what it was they wanted, all this excitement would have subsided and vanished into nothing. Frantically she searched her brain for some joking word in Malay that would make them laugh and break the wild tension. A new flash of lightning burst bluish white over the churning sea of savage faces, and the rumbling of thunder seemed to excite them still more, like a giant tomtom.

Jan Foster stood on the gallery of the office building,

with two of the assistants behind him. Three of the Chinese *mandoers* were swept towards him and, agitatedly pointing to the crowd, they jabbered something which was drowned in the turmoil of cries and steady murmur. Foster threw out his chest and, stepping forward, lifted his hand and began to speak. There was a sudden silence as the coolies listened to what he had to say, and then a sudden bursting cry of anger and spite.

"What did he say?" Jeff asked again.

"The fool!" Anders muttered. He pushed the two girls back, put his hands into his pockets and, as if nonchalantly sauntering from his bungalow, tried to make his way towards the office. At the same moment Foster pulled a gun from his belt, called a few sharp commands and a fraction of a second later the reports of three shots tore into the night.

III

TO RUN AMUCK is a simple expression for a most complicated process in the mind and soul of man. Happy men do not run amuck. Contented men do not run amuck. But if a man is worried, frightened, uprooted, if he suffers and is too inarticulate to express or even to understand his suffering; if he is tortured and has no outlet for the fear and hatred and wrath and bewilderment accumulated in his primitive soul; if some invisible dam gives way inside him and the inheritance of his savage ancestors overwhelms his mind and clouds his consciousness—then he will draw the knife from his belt, will

blindly rush forward and bury the blade in the first obstacle on his way to insanity.

The coolie Ahmet was such a man.

Ever since he had set foot on the shore of Sebang-nay, ever since he left his *desa*—he had lived in a dim and painful haze of incomprehension and bewilderment. He had been pummelled around, told what to do and what not to do. He had been ordered here and there, kicked in this direction and that, he had been yelled at in strange dialects and driven through alien country towards a destination which seemed to become more dreadful the closer it loomed ahead. When he was loaded onto the truck he had managed to keep his father, his son Wajang and his second wife and the little daughter with him. However, his first wife, the mother of his son, had disappeared from his side together with a cage of ducks. He hoped he would find her and the ducks again, but he was not certain of it. His questions were not answered, and he grew sullenly silent like the other coolies. His memory was weak, but while they were driven towards the plantation he remembered something he had seen many moons ago, when still a small boy. His father had taken him to a *desa* at the coast of Java, and there he had witnessed buffaloes being driven into the sea, forced to float and swim until they were hauled aboard a big ship which took them away for sale. He could not see much difference between these buffaloes and himself, and the bitter comparison filled him with helpless wrath. He had been told to take his bundles and his family off the truck, bring them across a narrow bridge, climb back onto the truck, drive on endlessly, under a sky which was filled with bad omens. He had arrived at a place

that smelt of fire and charred forest, had been received with coarse words and impolite shouting. He had been herded into a group, had been given no time to find his wife and his ducks, but had been driven on foot towards a kampong whose smell and looks he despised. Even in the dark of the night it did not look like a *dessa*, like an orderly and friendly village-community such as he was used to in his own home island; it looked rather like the barren places where the government kept the lepers of the district. His little Mohammedan soul shuddered at the stink and the sight of pigs which were grubbing in the mud puddles beneath the stilted houses. He hardly grasped that one of these houses was designed to become his home for six months. Someone pushed him, someone kicked him, until he began to ascend the ladder leading to a hole which was meant to be a door.

When Ahmet stumbled through this hole into the house he was faced by a scene the like of which he never wanted to witness again. A woman was sitting on the floor, writhing in labour pains, supported by two older women who assisted her. She was holding onto the posts of the crude bed, biting her own arms to stifle her screams. Blood flowed from her, and the odour of blood was all over the room. The sight of a woman in the labour of birth would not have frightened Ahmet, for he had helped both his wives in their hour of pain. But he felt that he was a stranger intruding on the most intimate and important event of a family's life. He wanted to scramble backwards, down the ladder, but a huge Chinese, standing at the foot, drove him up again with a curse and a cruel kick.

"It's your house and you have to sweep out whatever

doesn't belong in it," he was told. Resignedly he scrambled back again, while his father, pressing little Wajang to his wizened body, waited with his second wife and the baby girl at the foot of the ladder. This time Ahmet took in the sight of the whole room as it lay before him in the flickering light of a lamp which hung from the rafters. On the bed to which the labouring woman clung, an old man was stretched out, just such an old man as his own father was. He was dressed very cleanly and almost elegantly, he wore a jacket and a new sarong, he had his knife in his belt and his headgear was tied with accuracy; and he was dead. It was this sight which made Ahmet stop a second time, crouching in the door, before he addressed the two old women.

"Peace on you, old ones, peace on your labour, young one, and may the Lord give you many beautiful, strong sons. Forgive me for bringing my dirty presence into this room, but such are the orders. May I talk to the man over this family?"

His politeness was answered by a flood of curses from the old women, and even the young one interrupted her screams to turn her drenched face towards him, call him the offspring of a stray mongrel and tell him that her husband was sick, that his bowels had turned to water and that he had gone away not to soil the room with his sickness. Frightened and ashamed, Ahmet backed out a second time and stumbled down the ladder, tearing his sarong and skinning his legs.

"What is it, son?" his father asked him as he struggled to his feet.

"The house is full of evil spirits," Ahmet panted. "There is a dead man in it, and it will have to be puri-

fied by priests and sacrifices before it will be without danger to live in. I would have been ashamed to offer my buffalo a home like this," he added under his breath, as he saw one of the white *tuans* approaching them.

There was disorder and commotion all over the kampong as the other coolies with whom he had travelled on the boat assembled. Every one of them had to tell the same story. The inhabitants of the houses were reluctant to admit them inside. Some had soiled the huts so that no human being could be expected to settle down inside. Some of the coolies had been scared away by cursing women, like Ahmet himself; some had been beaten or stoned by men, who were defending their homesteads against intrusion.

"You will have to camp in the open for tonight," the *tuau* shouted at them. "Put down your bundles and go to sleep."

They looked up into the sky, and some of the older, more experienced coolies answered in a chorus: "There will be rain and a thunderstorm. We cannot leave our children without a roof."

Farther back, the women huddled together, muttering about the devils and evil spirits which they felt hovering everywhere. They spread their *slendangs* over their babies' faces to protect them, but it was an ineffective, threadbare protection against the evil around them and they knew it. Never in his life had Ahmet felt as helpless as now. Even his father had lost his wise, calm, cunning smile and looked grave and deeply perturbed. And there was no priest to give counsel or order the rites which would be helpful in these strange circumstances. They muttered and murmured and grumbled

they moved back and forth, some of the coolies pleaded with the *tuan* while some preached open rebellion.

Suddenly a tall figure appeared at the fringe of the unruly crowd and everyone turned to him: Fong, the Chinese.

"Friends," he said, "my brothers, be patient and do what I advise you. Follow me and wait in front of the house where I will hold council with the *tuan besar* and his men. This is what happened: two months ago three hundred coolies were brought here from Sumatra, as you were brought here tonight. They had contracts for six months' labour on the plantation of Lombok. It appears that great sickness broke out among these men and their families; many of them died and others became so weak they could not work as much as healthy men could. Thus the *tuan besar* decided to send them home and bring new coolies here: you, my brothers. The coolies who have been here before you refuse to be sent away now, when great mourning is over them and they have not earned enough money and their time is not up yet. They are coolies like you, they are men like you. If you help to drive them out tonight, there will come the day when you will be driven out just as they were. If you will join your strength with theirs and help them to obtain their rights, no one will dare to do to you what has been done to them. These are the orders: You will refuse to enter their houses and you will refuse to begin work before these coolies are satisfied. They have elected me with a group of trustworthy men to represent their demands and to submit their conditions. At the same time I shall have your contracts revised so that you are certain to be kept here for six full months. Remember what I told you

before. Only if we are absolutely united are we strong. If you agree with me, raise your right hands."

There was a unison murmur of "Be it so" as the long-fingered, thin-boned coolie hands were raised. Ahmet looked at his father. "Be it so," the old man said and raised his hand. "Be it so," Ahmet repeated after him. They were all used to holding council and having a voice and an opinion in their village communities. But never before had Ahmet felt as he felt now: that he was not himself, not a man free to decide, not a human being responsible for his own deeds, but an infinitesimal part of a crowd, shifting where the crowd shifted, doing what the crowd did. As he crept along in the mass and muddle of people slowly advancing towards an unknown goal, he felt like one of the legs of a centipede. He said so to his father, and his father gave him a short, dry cackle of amusement for an answer.

The *tuan besar* and his men, a few of the Chinese *mandoers*, a few older coolies and Fong entered the house at the end of the square, and Ahmet squatted down to wait with the crowd. The night seemed cold to him, for fear thins the blood in a man's veins and makes him shiver. Still he had not found his first wife of whom he was extremely fond, nor the cage with the ducks, worth more than one *rupia*.

They were waiting. The time went by, the night grew old, and still they were waiting. Ahmet waited with them—and what else could he have done? Could he alone step up, walk into that house and speak to the *tuan besar*? Could he tell him: "Let me go home to Java and to my village, *Tuan*, I hate this place, I can't be a contract coolie, I do not want to remain here six months,

"I want to go back this very night." Could he do this? No. Could he take his son, his father, his second wife and the bundles and sneak away, try to find his way to the shore, beg the *tuans* on the boat to take him back where he had come from? Impossible. He had signed with the print of his thumb, had accepted hand money and a blanket and sold himself into a dreadful life.

As Ahmet remembered the blanket, he looked around, found it and wrapped it around little Wajang. His glance glided over the small figure of his second wife and he felt something like pity for her. She was very young and very small and very sweet to caress. She had packed their heaviest bundle onto her back as was the duty of a good wife and there she sat, submissive, stooping under the burden. He made a movement to take the bundle off her shoulders and put it down beside her, but she looked at him and shook her head. Probably she was afraid it would be stolen from them and probably she was right. A sudden rush of fear came out of the darkness again, and Ahmet thought: This is a bad place where men get sick and die. I shall be sick and die, my bowels will turn to water and make me weak, and my father will lie still and dead, wrapped in the newsarong like the old man in that hut. And my little prince, my son Wajang, he too will die from breathing the air of this bad place. And as he thought so, he took the child from his father's arms and pressed him to himself, as if to give him better shield and protection.

He did not know how many hours of the night passed thus while his bewilderment grew and swelled and filled his whole stomach and hardened his liver so that he hated everything and everybody. But most of all he

hated and feared the *tuan besar* who had pale eyes like a ghost and red hair which is the sure mark of people who practice black magic and witchery. He knew that nothing good could come from a council with the *tuan besar*. And while some of the other coolies stirred and murmured with satisfaction when the *tuan besar* at last emerged from the house and stepped onto the gallery to talk to them, he was certain that every word of this man would mean evil to them.

"Coolies," the *tuan* shouted across the square (and even this word sounded like an insult). "Coolies, I have listened to the drivel your representatives had to say. You are not so stupid as to believe what they have promised you, namely, a change in your contracts and a settlement with the coolies who have worked here up to now, or rather, who didn't work but were just loafers and idlers. You have fallen under the influence of a few fools who want nothing but to stir up trouble. But I don't tolerate that sort of thing, not in Lombok. You have your contracts and you will work and be paid exactly as it is written in the contracts. You will camp tonight in the open; I'll take care that you get campfires and some food. Tomorrow your *mandoers* will show you your work and you will begin working at five o'clock in the morning. As for the old coolies, it is none of your business what happens to them. If they won't leave the kampong tonight, I'll have troops here tomorrow to restore order and discipline. And mind you, anyone who breaks this order will be sent to jail. That's all."

Little Wajang woke up from the loud shouting and the cries of anger which rose from the crowd as the *tuan*

ended his speech. He opened his dark eyes and rubbed them with his little fists. A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder frightened him and he began to cry. Javanese children hardly ever cry. Ahmet had never seen little Wajang cry, and it was as if the tears in those deep, dark eyes would flow over and into his own inside, which could not hold another drop of pain or fear. A few of the boldest men rushed up the steps to plead with the *tuan besar*; they all yelled at the same time, the crowd pressed on behind them with shrieks of wrath and cries of fear. Ahmet, who had held himself in the rear, near the women and children, was swept forward with the others. The pressure grew stronger; he felt choked, it was as if his ribs would break and his lungs would split. He opened his mouth and let out a long howl, he was still swept on in the stamping, trampling mass. He had lost his father and his wife with the baby girl, but he still held little Wajang clutched in his arms, trying to protect him, and Wajang cried loud and fearfully. Ahmet could not see what happened on those steps in front because he was wedged in between bigger men and his face was pushed against the sweating back of one of them. He had stopped being a single, living creature and had become a particle of the fear and wrath of three hundred disappointed coolies.

And then he heard the hateful voice of the *tuan besar* shout something; though it was so loud it could be heard everywhere, he did not understand it because it was Dutch. The men had surrounded the *tuan besar*, they gesticulated and pulled his coat and yelled at him, all at the same time. Suddenly the *tuan besar* had a gun in his hand. The women in the rear screamed, and some of

the men turned and tried to run away, trampling over others who still surged forward.

Ahmet had seen a rifle before but had never heard a shot in his life. When a tiger had troubled his *dessa* he had gone with the men of the village, armed with spears and pointed bamboo poles, and helped to close in on the tiger, and the best hunter of the village had killed him without a shot. Now he heard the three shots, and although Jan Foster shot into the air—to frighten the coolies or to call for assistance—these three shots punctured Ahmet's mind and soul and sent him off like a human bullet. With the first report he felt little Wajang go limp and silent in his arms, and it was as if a knife split him from head to foot as he thought: my son has been killed. His arms were suddenly paralyzed, and he felt the little body slipping from him, unable to hold him tight. He did not know whether little Wajang was trampled underfoot or lifted up by someone. He did not know anything any more. His limbs were stiff, his mouth filled with hot, gushing froth. After the third report, he saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing. He shot forward, and the crowd, familiar with the meaning of this sight, made way for him in awe and horror.

IV

"AMUCK!" SAID ANDERS between his teeth as the coolie shot forward through the empty space. He felt Jeff stiffen at his side. Pat, standing in back of him, clutched

her fingers to her mouth. This was a nightmare, and she wished she had not drunk those last two whiskies and could understand what all this meant and whether it was really happening or whether it was only a distorting bubble in her hazy brain. The man who ran forward, his knife stiffly sticking from his hand, looked almost funny with his cataleptic, puppetlike movements, and Pat giggled nervously. Jan Foster aimed and shot, but the man raced on. Suddenly Jan Foster stood all alone on the top of the stairs while the men around him scrambled for shelter. Anders pushed the girls back and tried once more to break through the crowd, but it was impossible. The coolie came up against Jan Foster; crouching, almost doubling over, he raised his stiff arm and dug the knife into the body of the *tuan besar*. Then he bounced back, crumpled up and fell to the ground; he rolled down the steps and remained lying there like a limp rag. Jan Foster put his gun back into his pocket, grinned and turned to go back into the office. At the door he sagged, his knees gave way and he came tumbling down, into the arms of one of the assistants. Blood gushed over his white coat and over the assistant's sleeve. All this took only a few seconds, while the crowd looked on in petrified silence.

Pat, as she saw the blood and realized what had happened, broke into one long, high, wailing scream. Anders reeled around and shook her. "Quiet, quiet for God's sake, pull yourself together," he hissed at her. But Pat went on screaming, hysterical and unable to stop herself. "Be quiet, damn you!" Anders whispered. "Or do you want us all killed?"

Pat screamed and laughed and screamed. Anders looked at her for another second. "Excuse me," he said

to Jeff, swung out and hit Pat on the chin. She went down without another sound.

But it was too late. Pat's screams had set off the spark, the hysterical scream of a white woman spreading hysteria from one end of the compound to the other. The coolies came stampeding towards Anders, who stood there with the pipe in his mouth, grimly aware of the danger. He raised his arms as the first men reached him. "Look here, you fools," he called out. "I am your friend. I have no gun, I don't even have a knife. What do you want?"

It stopped their blind and senseless storming just long enough for him to pick up Pat, drag her inside the bungalow, pull Jeff into the house, slam the door and turn the key. In the dark he stood panting, trying to regulate his breath. "Jeff?" he called.

She saw the tiny glow of his pipe and smelt the smoke of it, and it was something to hold onto. "It's all right, Anders," she whispered. "I'm not afraid. Don't worry about me."

A rain of rocks clattered against the door; Anders closed the wooden shutters of the window. Jeff pushed the chair and the table as a barricade between the door and herself: Pat was still knocked out. The crowd outside roared and screamed. "Now they have gone out of hand," Anders said.

"You must go," Jeff said, touching his arm in the dark. "Don't waste your time here. That's your business, out there."

He hesitated, but he knew that she was right, and he loved her for it. He loved her for her gallantry and her calm composure in the face of the dangerous uproar—oh,

how he loved her! He found her hand and pressed it without another word. There was a stir and a sigh and a moan as Pat came to and sat up.

"Mr Anderson? Where are you, Mr Anderson?" she whimpered.

"Be quiet, Pat," he said. "Miss Halden is staying here with you. Nothing is going to happen to you."

"Where are you going?" Pat wailed, as he passed her on his way to the back door. She grabbed his legs and clung to them. "Don't go away, they'll kill you! My God, don't go, don't go, don't leave us here, they'll kill all three of us," she cried out. Anders bent down and loosened her hands from his trousers.

Jeff stood over her with the little flashlight she had found at last. "Stop blubbering," she said coldly. "Go, Anders, quick, before worse things happen."

"Thanks—darling," he whispered and reached the door.

"You are sending him out there? You? And you say that you love him?" he heard Pat scream as he passed through the bedroom. And then Jeff's answer, cool and composed: "It's my way of loving him, not yours, Pat."

He went out the back door and noticed with a mixture of satisfaction and yet deeper worry that the coolies had turned away from the front of his bungalow and were now rushing towards the store where they usually bought their provisions. It was quiet and empty in back of the bungalows, and with a few leaps he reached the main bungalow from the rear entrance and entered Jan Foster's office.

The *tuan besar* had slumped down in a deep rattan chair, pressing a towel against his stomach, while the youngest assistant, pale and sick-looking, hovered over

him. The two older assistants were busy handing out guns and ammunition to the Chinese *mandoers*.

"How are you getting on, Batara Guru?" Anders said, bending over the stricken man.

Foster gave a distorted grin. "It's only a scratch," he said. "But, *Godverdomme*, if I hadn't shot that devil it could have been dangerous."

The young assistant came with a glass of water in one hand and a bottle of Holland gin in the other. Anders shoved him aside. "Don't give him anything to drink," he said. The knife had been pulled from the wound and was lying on the table, with the blood on it beginning to clot. "Don't move, *Tuan Besar*," said Anders. "Just hold still for a short while, I'll take you to town and have you stitched up." Jan Foster kept on muttering Dutch curses.

"The bleeding has stopped," the young assistant reported.

"Good," Anders said and turned to the *mandoers*. "Take the guns and show them, if necessary," he ordered in Malay. "But no ammunition. It won't do to have more shooting tonight. All we need is to scare them into order again. Schroeder and Brinck, you stand by the gasoline tank and don't let them tamper with it. We don't want an explosion. They'll break into the store first—no use stopping them, it will quiet them down. Chang, have the poor devil out there picked up and see whether there is still some breath left in him. *Tuan Besar*, do you think you could stay alone for a few minutes? I'll send my boy to you as soon as I can find him. Come on, Keith, we have no time to lose."

A short while ago Anders Anderson had been an em-

barrassed, confused and helpless male between two fighting and most resourceful females. But this was a man's job, and he took it over without delay. He had a dead coolie and a dying manager on his hands—for, no doubt, Jan Foster was a dying man, and dying bravely. Anders had himself and three assistants against more than a thousand rioting coolies. It was barely possible that two of the Chinese *mandoers* might prove reliable in an emergency. But most probably their pacifistic Chinese instinct would get the better of them and they would go into hiding until the riot had subsided. And there was Jeff, left alone with a hysterical and half-drunk girl whom she despised. He shook off the thought of Jeff behind her flimsy barricade of rattan furniture. This was not the time to think of a girl, however dear and precious to his heart. He filled his pipe once more and went out the front door, followed by the consternated young assistant.

The little street was almost deserted now, except for some women and children huddled together around the bonfire. The roaring of the coolies came now from the clearing near the lake, where the storehouses stood. Anders jumped into his car which waited at the side of his bungalow like a faithful pet. Turut had disappeared. Anders threw the car into gear, it shot forward, with Keith on the running board. The main danger was that the coolies would blast the gasoline tank, and Anders drove first down there, where the main road ran into the small settlement. Schroeder and Brinck were standing there, gun in hand, and with them were a handful of natives, their houseboys and water boys, the young clerks from the office and one or two of the Javanese *mandoers*. The *mandoers* were chewing betel and spitting

the red juice onto the ground, looking sleepy, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"It's going to rain," old Brinck called to him and pointed up to the sky.

During the last ten minutes Anders had been too busy to pay any attention to the flashes of lightning and the crashing thunder. "Let's hope it will," he called back, jerked the car around and raced it towards the clearing. Even before he came around the bend of the lake, he saw that he was too late. A flame shot up into the air, followed by a cry of wild satisfaction, as if a giant skyrocket had gone off.

"Great lord, what are they doing now?" Keith murmured.

"Kerosene," Anders answered curtly. Again he turned his car, racing back to the gasoline tank. "Sorry, Brinck," he shouted to the old assistant, "We must split forces. Schroeder, take half of the men and come with me. You, Brinck, stay here. Don't do anything crazy—if the fire spreads towards the tank, run for dear life. Come on, and hold on!"

They hung onto the car like a cluster of locusts, nine men in all, as he raced it down the road and towards the fire. He had just remembered that a number of fire extinguishers were kept in one of the barns. But when he arrived there, he found that it was locked up as usual. He set his teeth and drove his car through the wooden door; it crashed open, splintering and crackling. Schroeder organized his scant number of firemen while Anders and Keith handed them the extinguishers. The fire spread fast, hissing and roaring, drowning out all other noises, the yelling and chantlike shouts of the coolies, the in-

cessant beating of the tomtoms, even the rumbling of the approaching thunderstorm. Bitter smoke fell heavily over everything, the thick, black smoke of kerosene. There were red flames and yellow flames and blue flames. Some shot high into the air, breaking into fountains of sparks. Some smouldered red and dangerously near the ground and some leaped from house to house, from kampong to kampong. The blue flames were low and quick, they ran along the pathways, up the stilts, they reached the lumber piled up for the powerhouse that has been planned for three years but had never been built. The beams and posts which had been stored there, dry as tinder, oozing resin, broke into a mass of sparks and fire. Burning bamboo poles cracked everywhere with the sound of frantic machine-gun fire.

A thousand men, natives, coolies, gone insane, their minds distorted with the senseless frenzy of destruction, danced and ran and crouched between the flames. Some were carrying more and more of the oil cans from the storehouse. Others cut them open with their knives or with sharp rocks. Kerosene flooded the place, was poured everywhere, was fed to the fire as to a hungry monster. These coolies had been trained to handle the dangerous liquid, they had learned how to burn down one mile of jungle growth after another, they had been taught to destroy with fire without being destroyed by it. There was some sort of order in their madness, some plan in their insanity. Kampong 3, where all the trouble had started, had been set afire, methodically and successfully. Bamboo walls and thatched roofs burned in a quick blaze. Soon there glowed only skeletons of houses through the smoke, caving in and tumbling down. The dogs, the

pigs, the chickens and ducks had tried to escape, adding their anguished screams and cries to the unchained uproar of human voices. Now the wind came leaping from the hills, hurling scraps of fire through the air, fanning the flames, bending the trees, tearing the smoke to shreds. There was a new crash, a deafening burst of noise, but this was no thunder, it was an explosion inside the storehouse, as the oil cans popped open in the heat and the oil began to burn inside, lifting the roof off the long, low building. There was one great insane cry and the coolies turned and ran away, with the flames pursuing them, reaching out for them, throwing sparks and fiery rags and burning debris after them.

They turned, they sobered up, as suddenly as they had gone into their frenzy. They raced down to the lake and threw themselves into the water. Anders and his eight men had managed to block the fire from reaching the gasoline tank, but were otherwise helpless against the raging element; now they' stopped long enough to take one huge breath. Their faces were smudged, their hands were numb, their eyes watered and smarted. "Stay here, I'll talk to them," Anders said and walked off, treading over creeping flames and embers, almost without feeling the heat.

The climax of the fire seemed past; the wind had grown into a storm, but this storm was moist and wet and brought a cool dampness from the mountains. It touched the flames like a gigantic, moist hand, and they bowed and subsided under this touch. It snuffed out sparks and dampened the glowing beams and roofs and rafters, pressing the clouds of smoke down over the whole compound as if to choke them all.

Anders reached the shore of the lake; it looked like a vision out of Dante's *Inferno*, like liquid fire, as its surface reflected and multiplied the flames.

"Come here, men," Anders called across the water. "All hands are needed to save you."

Standing in the water up to their shoulders, they listened, they turned, and slowly they crept ashore. Their fury was spent, they were empty, exhausted and deflated.

"Where are your women and children?" Anders asked them. "Where are your old and sick people? Did you make sure they were safe before burning down your own houses?"

They hung their heads; they were a small, sobered group, tired from the excess, fifty or sixty men who were coming to their senses, against hundreds who were still raging. "You fools!" Anders said. "If the fire bites into the gasoline tanks we shall all be torn to shreds and hurled to the moon. Hurry, let each man take a can and bring water; form a chain from the lake to the road. Don't stand and stare at me. Do something!"

They stood like a wall, with the flickering red of the fire on their faces; they looked like drunkards or sleepwalkers. Finally one man unfastened himself from the group and walked towards Anders. "*Tuan*," he said.

"Good, good, *baik, baik*," Anders said to him; only then he noticed the knife in the man's hands and the blind expression on his face. He gripped his arm and twisted it till the knife fell on the ground. The man turned around and slunk back towards the others. Two of them took his hands and led him away, and he went with them without a struggle. The rest of the group approached Anders, almost crouching and with folded hands. "Give the order

and we obey, *Tuan*," one of them said; it was Fong, the tall, bony Chinese, surrendering his beaten troops.

Out of the smoke a ghost came walking towards Anders as he turned, a ghost in a torn and smudged white suit, with singed eyebrows and a blistered face.

"Everything under control," he said. "No more fireworks for tonight, Brinck wants me to report to you that the gasoline tank is safe. Do you think the insurance company will accept my claim for a new pair of long bags?"

"Charley!" Anders cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Saw the beastly illumination from the top of the hill. Turned Minnie Mouse around and came back to see if I could be of any use here. Incurable Boy Scout, I presume. Put the shoulder to the wheel, and all that. I say, what's the matter with your hand?"

Anders lifted his right hand and looked at it. It was sticky with blood. He wiped it off on his shirt, and now he discovered that two fingers hung limp and immobile. There was no pain, only the blood and the limpness.

"Cut the sinews, I suppose," he said and grinned grimly. "Better than having a knife stuck into my guts like poor Batara Guru. Come on, Charley, there is a pipe in my pocket, could you put it into my mouth and light it for me?"

"Glad to oblige you," Charley said. "'Never refuse to do a friend a favour if it is within your power,' Katharine Myrtle, preface to the third edition."

"You have done me a favour today for which you ought to be punched in the nose," Anders said, and with a rush he remembered Jeff, locked in with Pat in his bungalow. He had forgotten everything about her, totally and absolutely, during the last quarter of an

hour. "What are we going to do now? Simply let it burn out by itself?" he asked Charley.

"Come, come, don't keel over now," Charley said, leading him gently away, as a small bundle of fire came creeping towards them. "I have seen Balinese virgins in trance walk through flames, but I doubt that you are endowed with the necessary requirement to accomplish such a feat."

There was still smoke and fire and storm and a crackling, roaring, whistling hell all around them. Then a crash of thunder shattered the ground. And then there was a soft rustle and patter overhead, a shower of rain-drops, gentle at first, and then growing heavier, as big and heavy as eggs, and then a furious lashing sheet of water dropped down from the night. The storm had at last crossed the range of hills and come on giant wings to quench the fire and save the plantation of Lombok.

V

A SURPRISE AWAITED ANDERS when he returned to his bungalow and discovered that Jeff and Pat had disappeared. Instead of keeping behind their barricade and tremblingly waiting for the outcome of the riot, Jeff had gone out and established a first-aid station of some sort. Pat, very sober, very quiet, very small and submissive, had followed in her wake and tried to live up to the standard set by Jeff and Anders. Thus Anders and Charley found the two girls in the centre of the group of women who had crowded into the waiting room of the

office bungalow. Jeff's knowledge of Malay had progressed by leaps and bounds during the anguished half-hour of the rioting, and she seemed to have no difficulty in understanding the coolie women or in being understood by them. She attended to burns and blisters, she cleaned wounds and bandaged injured limbs. Many of the coolie children had been trampled and hurt in the stampede, and many had been ill even before the outburst. The same big tin cans which had poured oil into the flames were here restored to their ordinary use as water containers. Bamboo was cut into splints, and Anders recognized with a fleeting grin that his bed sheets, his curtains and even his white suits had been commandeered to serve as bandages. He stopped and looked down at Jeff who was busy tying a splint to the hand of a young boy, and she smiled up at him, as if the entire situation were the most natural thing in her life. "I've seized the medicine cabinet from the office," she said. "Pat, could you hand me the scissors? Thanks."

Pat was the first one to notice the blood on his hand, but she did not scream this time. "Is it bad, Mr Anderson?" she asked timidly.

"No, it's nothing. You girls will have it fixed in a minute," he said, holding out his cut fingers to have them bandaged. He was drenched with rain, and more rain fell with the steady roar of a river while the thunder crashed and the storm kept on howling around the house. Charley came back from the office and looked serious.

"How is the *tuan besar*?" Anders asked.

"We must take him to the hospital at once, storm or no storm," said Charley. "There is still enough life in good old Batara Guru for him to want everybody shot and

hanged, but he is sinking. I'm afraid . . . " He felt the sentence unfinished and went back to Ann's husband.

"And the coolie?" Anders asked.

"Ahmet? He is dead—and probably it is better so," Jeff answered quietly.

"You sound as fatalistic as a Mohammedan," Anders said. He was no longer surprised that she knew even the name of the coolie who had run amuck. He looked around. The children did not cry and the women's faces were so dull and expressionless they did not even show resignation. Jeff lifted a little boy from a chair where she had made some sort of bed for him. "This is Wajang, Ahmet's little son," she said. "Remember him from the boat? He is very ill. It might be a brain fever or a concussion or a very bad attack of malaria. We must take him with us to the hospital, because he is our child now. His mother gave him to me."

She smiled into Anders' eyes, and he marvelled at how simply and naturally she said it: our child. "Oh, Anders," she said, "so much has to be done. We shall need tons of quinine and miles of clean linen and a few trainloads of soap."

And that was Jeff Halden's epilogue to the great disaster. Half an hour later their cars drove through storm and whipping rain towards Sebang. Away ahead of the rest was Minnie Mouse, racing on in the insecure beam of her single headlight, her flimsy top up and the water leaking through it. Charley had accomplished a great feat of engineering by building a waterproof shelter out of an old umbrella, his old Burberry coat and some native mats and huge *keladi* leaves. In this shelter the *tuan besar* was propped up and secured, with a wad of

towels tied tightly to his wound, but otherwise rather comfortable. They had filled him up with Holland gin, which was very bad from a medical standpoint but very good and merciful for a man whose pains had to be eased and who had a very small chance of survival anyway. With every flash of lightning Charley threw a quick glance at the face of Batara Guru, which was marked by death, drained of colour, waxlike and unreal, with the yellow moustache wilted. For a while Pat, who drove Anderson's car, had tried to keep close behind Minnie Mouse, but she could not keep up with Charley's break-neck speed. Soon the little red car disappeared behind glassy sheets of rain, following the trucks with the wounded and burned coolies, under the supervision of Fong, who was badly burned himself.

Yes, Pat had to drive Anders' car, for he was unable to drive it himself because of his disabled hand, and Jeff had announced that she was afraid of driving through the storm and darkness on the unknown road. Whether this was true or whether she had made it up as a kind pretence for restoring Pat's self-respect, Anders could not tell. Their top was up too, but the rain beat in a steady flood into the car and drenched them to the skin. On her lap Jeff held the sleeping or delirious little Wajang in a nest she had contrived out of every scrap and rag she could find. Turut, whose duty it would have been to drive the car, had evaporated and vanished into nothingness the moment the riot had broken out. For to be cowardly is the prerogative of the simple man in the East Indies.

It was a strange transport back along the road over which Jeff and Anders had driven not so long ago

through the calm and scent and sweetness of a tropical night. She did not say so, but Anders seemed to sense her thoughts, for out of a long silence he said: "Yes, Jeff, this is a country of abrupt contrasts, in nature and in man. One moment everything is yielding and harmonious and splendid and the next moment some dam gives way or some cloud bursts or some river floods over and then you are at the mercy of God."

Jeff seemed to think this over, for it took her a long time to answer, and Anders almost believed she had not heard what he had spoken, for the storm snatched every sound and every breath from his mouth and tossed it into the ravaging, streaming, splashing burst of water that was precipitated from the invisible sky. But Jeff needed time to say what she had to say and—being Mynheer Van Halden's daughter—she chose her words carefully, for they were of the utmost importance.

"Look here, Anders," she said at last, "I wanted to see what your life was like on the plantation, and it was very kind of you to take me out and show it to me. I realize that it is not always as bad as it was tonight, but I am grateful that I saw Lombok at its worst. It's a dreary, tiresome life at its best, it's hard and barren when it goes its humdrum course, and there are dangers lurking behind every one of your blessed Hevea trees—that much I know now. To live in a place like that, without pleasures, without inspiration, without human companionship—weeding and tapping, weeding and tapping, burning down the jungle, planting trees, weeding and tapping, until the trees are exhausted and you plant another section—is that really all you want? And is it worth risking your life every day and every hour? I didn't know it

would be like that, Anders. I told you I have no imagination. But now I know, and I won't let you go on being a planter and living in Lombok. I could not bear the thought of going away myself and leaving you there. You don't have to stay in Lombok, Anders, really you don't. My father will give you any position you might want; he thinks a great deal of you. He could transfer you to the main office in Amsterdam, or at least to the office in Batavia. It would still be rubber, wouldn't it? You could still work and achieve something in your own field. And you wouldn't have to pay with your lifeblood for it. If I beg you, Anders, for my sake and yours, you would give up Lombok, wouldn't you?"

Anders smiled down at her with his split, parched lips, feeling very sorry for her. He released his left hand from hers, which he had been holding, and took the pipe from his mouth; this was the decision of his life, and there was only one way he could choose. "Darling Jeff, my good little soldier," he said, "I can't give up Lombok and you know it. I can't give it up just *because* it's hard work and tedious work and sometimes even a bit dangerous work. Somebody has to do this sort of work, my girl, somebody has to do it. If every man should run away as soon as the going gets hard, where would the world be? If we don't live in caves any longer and don't cat each other up after hitting each other over the head with a big stone—if we live in houses and drive cars, and have schools and institutes of research and civilization and art and culture and all that—it is because of stubborn, simple men of my own sort, I suppose. I detest words that sound noble, like 'progress' and 'mankind' and such high-falutin blah-blah. That's not what I'm trying to

say. What I want to say is simply that someone has to do the dirty work and stick to it. The world needs all sorts of things which are hard to get. The world needs rubber, for instance, and someone has to provide it. My job is to get rubber: planting and weeding and tapping and planting and weeding and tapping: and I like doing it. Jeff, my girl, my dear, dear girl, you wouldn't want me if I should run away from my post just because a few crazy poor devils set fire to a few gallons of oil. Or because I—because I have fallen in love with you. No Jeff, if I know anything about you, you wouldn't like me if I were a deserter." Towards the end of his speech he had to shout, because a new succession of thunderbolts rent the air.

The car swerved precariously. "Steady, Pat, steady," Anders said and patted Pat's shoulder. She righted the car again and kept it straight in the cascading river which had been a road. She had lost control for a moment only because she had tears in her eyes and for a second everything had been blurred. So that's it, Pat thought, her eyes straight on the flooded road, her hands gripping the wheel. So that's the real Mr Anderson. He never talked to me like that. He never spoke a serious word to me, come to think of it. He made jokes, yes, he made compliments and kidded me. He danced with me, yes, he even kissed me—but that wasn't him. I don't know anything about him. Maybe he was right, maybe I wouldn't have enough gumption for a man like him. Maybe I didn't get enough vitamins or something when I was a child, maybe that's what makes all the difference between her and me. Maybe he wouldn't care if I baked him waffles, and then I would be hurt. I would hang up

nice chintz curtains in his house, yes; but she has the nerve to tear them down and cut them up into bandages, and he likes it. No, I wouldn't want to live on that hellish plantation, not even with Mr Anderson. Imagine me driving through a storm-me! I was always scared of thunder, I would creep into my bed and pull the pillows over my ears. There are no storms like this in Azusa. I'm tired. I'm terribly tired. I want to go home to the States and never see a boat or a train again in my life. I've had enough adventures, thank you.

She gave up thinking and concentrated every muscle and nerve on the car and the road. "That's not a road, it's Niagara Falls," she muttered grimly when the car began to coast down the grading which led to the bridge over Kuri River. The soaked brakes had given up functioning, and Pat shifted frantically into second and first gear to slow down the skidding speed. The car swerved, the wheels could not grip the softened, wet, cloying ground, it was a precarious descent. Trees had fallen across the road, but somehow she managed to drive over them. The closer they came to the bridge the louder the roar of wind and weather grew. Anders got up and tried to penetrate the sheets of rain which cut them off from every sight like a huge window of frosted glass. "Slow down, Pat, slow down," he roared at her through the unbridled noise of the storm.

"I can't, the brakes don't work," Pat roared back.

"Slow down, for heaven's sake," he yelled again. She had no power over the car, it was like skidding and coasting and swerving through a roaring, pouring, watery hell. She did not know what she was doing, but she sensed new danger in Mr Anderson's excited call; she

could not hold the car, but she managed to turn it towards the bank at the side of the road. They drove into a tree, there was the impact and the jolt, then the wheels churned into the ground, slowed down and the car stopped.

"That was perfect," Anders said as Pat turned her harassed and frightened face to him. "You are a wonderful driver, Pat. You seem to have saved our lives."

Little Wajang had been jerked from his sleep and looked hazily into the face of the woman who bent over him. He was very cold and yet very hot and very ill. He looked at Jeff, not crying like a sick child, but silent like a suffering little animal. "Sleep, my little prince," she whispered to him in Malay as she had heard his mother whisper to him. "Sleep, my little prince, tomorrow we shall go to the bazaar and buy you a new red sarong and a kris and more cigarettes than you have fingers." Wajang listened to these words and closed his eyes again, smiling. For a kris makes a man, and cigarettes are what little Javanese boys like best from the day they are weaned.

Anders had jumped from the car and waded on through the rain. The two girls saw his wind-blown figure being swallowed up after a few steps, and the beam of the headlights bounced off the darkness as if it were a solid wall made of a harder element than water. There had been no thunder or lightning for several minutes, but something was crashing and roaring quite close in the dark. Anders came back, he bobbed up into the light again, like a deep-sea diver reaching the surface of the ocean.

"Listen, Pat," he said, looking into her face with an

odd smile, as if he were sorry for her but didn't want to show it. "It is as I thought. The bridge is gone. It breaks down a few times every year during the wet monsoon. The river is flooded and there is a lot of debris piled up. There is not a thing we can do but drive through the whole mess. I've done it often before. If we wait it'll only get worse. Do you think you want to risk it?"

Pat gave no answer, but Jeff looked at the sick child in her lap and nodded decisively. "We have to get through," she said. "Wajang needs a doctor—and my father will be terribly upset if we don't show up in time. Or are you too afraid, Pat?"

Pat grinned grimly. "Me?" she said. "No. There are advantages in being a truck driver's daughter, after all."

Anders climbed back into the car and sat down on the front seat next to Pat. "I can't do much with this damned hand of mine," he said with a shrug. "But wait, I'll sit beside you and help you steer it with my left hand. All right? Jeff, hold onto everything. Slow now, slow. Here we go. Steady, Pat. steady, don't be afraid. It's just a bit of extra fun."

The fun consisted of a rocking, rolling, shaking tangle of driftwood and fallen trees and logs and pieces of bamboo walls, which were piled up twelve feet high where the bridge had been before. Between the debris the water of the river cascaded down, tugging at a piece here and tearing loose a piece there, sweeping more logs towards the pile of destruction and keeping the whole mess in a constant, slow, revolving movement.

"Here," Anders said, steering with his left hand. "Can you see, Pat? Charley seems to have left a sort of pontoon for us. Good old Charley! Now keep your fingers

crossed, girls. If this mess holds out just a few minutes, this is really child's play. Now more to the right—try not to hit that log—and now give it all the gas you can—don't look at anything, look straight ahead. Didn't you ever dream of becoming a tightrope walker, Pat? Well, that's it, that's it. Drive a Studebaker six across a rope—gas, now gas, more gas. There—we made it!”

It was much worse than the worst dream Pat had ever had in her whole life, and she was inclined to nightmares and bad dreams from which she woke up with a scream, drenched in perspiration. The tangle of moving debris gave way under the wheels and pranced up in front of them. Anders talked incessantly because he had a feeling that Pat might faint the moment he stopped talking. He talked to hide the worst danger from her: that the logs would pile up and crash down on top of them. The last few yards were almost a leap, with two wheels turning in the air and the other two unable to find a hold on the slippery rim of the riverbank. The moment they had reached the other side, the entire pile began to move rapidly, while new masses of drifting debris shot out from the dark, covered with white, foamy, sloshing bursts of the river flood. The car shot ahead for a whole stretch, because Pat seemed unable to take her foot from the accelerator. Her knees shook and she had no control of her legs. Then the car stopped, trembling like an exhausted racehorse. Pat let her hands sink limply from the wheel. Whisky, was all she could think. She did not say it, but Jeff came forward from the back seat and held a bottle to Pat's lips. “Come on, Pat, don't give in,” she said. “Drink. It'll do you good.” Pat took a gulp of the gin. but it didn't do her any good. In fact, she hated it,

she hated the smell of it and the taste of it and the burning in her dried-out throat. She shook her head and looked around. It had stopped thundering and the storm was gone. The rain quickly got thinner and thinner. Suddenly there was the moon again, white and clean in a clean-washed piece of sky. It had been a night to forget that there had ever been a moon. But there it was now, a soft round face, looking down over treetops and palm groves and the glitter of rice fields, terrace after terrace. Every raindrop was turned into a jewel, and the very air, hung with silver mist, seemed a fabric from fairyland.

"Didn't I tell you it would be fun!" Anders said gently to Pat.

She closed her eyes. "I'm all pooped," she replied.

Anders put his left hand over her right one which rested limply in her lap. "Thanks, Pat. You got us through all right," he said. "You are very good."

"Yes, I know, Mr Anderson. The trouble is—I'm just not quite good enough," Pat said and took the wheel again.

The Departure



THE PARTY ON BOARD THE *Tjaldane* was over. The rain-storm had put an early end to it, as most of the guests took their leave when the boat began to pitch and roll in the swell, when the wind began to whistle in the riggings and the clouds were rent by lightning and the fast approaching crackling of thunder. Some of the more sensitive guests, like the *nonja* resident and her official husband, had politely thanked their host and left at the first faint signs of the oncoming storm. Some of the others had tried to stay on and enjoy the rare festivity to the last possible moment. The native crowd on the pier had waited until the first heavy raindrops lashed through the air and then they had left with great laughter, in a flurry of oiled Chinese umbrellas, big *keladi*

leaves, and festive batik shawls held over their sleek heads. Some of the most persistent and hardened representatives of the port had remained on the boat and taken over the salon, where a frantic poker party had been started and the stakes went higher and higher. The cabin boys had tried to rescue some of their lovely decorations, but the storm was too swift for their efforts. Soon the deck was a sad mess of extinguished Chinese lanterns, sodden tissue paper and soaked streamers.

Mynheer Van Halden gave a deep sigh of fatigue as he stretched out on his bunk and surrendered to the swell and sway of the boat. He was tired, but he could not go to sleep before Jeff had come back. This evening was a bit too much for us, he told his exhausted heart. A gay little melody came whistling down the corridor, Mozart's Minuet from "Don Giovanni," and for once Halden was sorry not to have demanded a cabin to himself. He closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep when Vandengraaf opened the door and tiptoed in. Vandengraaf was a considerate man, and he stopped whistling the moment he entered. Halden watched him through half-closed eyes. Vandengraaf had circulated his celebrated scrap-book among the people of Sebang, and now he pulled his tin trunk from under his berth and tenderly tucked his treasure in for the night. Then he straightened up again, whistled a little scrap of music, remembered his cabin mate and stopped again.

"Don't worry about your daughter, Mynheer," he said, as if Halden had never pretended to be asleep. "Anderson will bring her back safely as soon as the storm is over. You know how short an outbreak of this sort lasts in this latitude."

"I am not worried," Halden replied wearily. "Jeff is a young lady of extraordinary resources. In fact, she likes nothing better than to run through the rain."

"Have you tried to telephone to the Estate?" Vandengraaf went on, paying no attention to Halden's words. "It might soothe your nerves."

"My nerves are in the best of order," Halden said angrily. "Besides, I did telephone to Lombok. That is, I tried to telephone, but the connection seems to have been disturbed by the storm."

"I see," Vandengraaf said and began to whistle. "At least it has cooled off a bit," he added contentedly. Halden had closed his eyes again and gave no answer. Vandengraaf watched him with an expression of sympathy which, in its sincerity, changed his foxy features to an amazing degree.

"Maybe you'd care for a game of chess?" he said gently. "It's the one distraction that never fails us."

It took Halden quite a few minutes before he answered. Finally he sat up and straightened his thin white hair. "All right," he said gratefully. "You are a pest, Vandengraaf—but let's have your game of chess."

Vandengraaf had used these minutes to pull out the little bridge table, produce his small travel-chessboard and put up the chessmen. Halden looked with a wry smile at these preparations, which had anticipated his willingness to play. "Sometimes I could almost believe that you are able to read minds," he said teasingly.

"I could not fool a man like you with a few easy tricks of practical psychology," Vandengraaf answered. He offered the older man the only chair, while he himself

sat down on his berth. "Too bad the Huns have taken over the salon for the time being," he said. "We must accommodate ourselves in our lair."

Halden began the game with the Lopez opening, and the first few moves went off automatically. As soon as he looked down at the familiar and friendly pattern of the board and got the feel of the finely chiseled figures into his fingers, he felt easier. He was a lonely man, and the chessboard was one of the few reliable friends he possessed. Vandengraaf took his pawn to the king's four, and he countered him with the knight to the king's bishop's three. The next move of the bishop was too easy to keep his mind occupied, and immediately the unpleasant thoughts overwhelmed him once more. I was a fool. Why did I let Jeff take this night ride? Why did I permit things to get as far as that? I should have put in my veto the first day when young Anderson came into the dining room. Again he lived through that moment when the door had opened and the young Dane had entered, looking so much like his dead father that Halden's heart had leaped and raced on and then stopped as if never to beat again. . . .

"Your move, Mynheer," Vandengraaf said. Halden took his knight and moved it to the queen's five. "Good," Vandengraaf said appreciatively. He rested his head in his hand and contemplated his next move. "Don't whistle," Halden said, irritated by a burst of Wagnerian motives. "*Verzeihung*," Vandengraaf said, moving his pawn to the queen's rook's three.

. . . Looking like his father, before he was a mangled, bloody mass of torn flesh and broken bones. Looking as hatefully strong and perfect and invulnerable as Anders

Anderson before the tiger had been through with him. . . .

"You are absent-minded, Mynheer," said Vandengraaf. "If you don't concentrate, the whole game won't help you to relax. Don't think of your daughter and young Anderson now. Think of your bishop—he's in danger."

"Stop harping on the same silly theme," Halden said irritably. "What's wrong with young Anderson?"

Vandengraaf shot a quick glance across the chess-board. "Nothing as far as I can see. Only that he is old Anderson's son," he said. "I happen to be acquainted with every bit of colonial gossip. I like the stories the old natives recite when they've had too much palm wine in their bellies, for instance. Anderson was a well-liked man, and the old men of Tanatua still chant some legends about his death."

Halden gave no answer. He let his bishop go, but with his knight he took the queen's pawn, and then he closed his eyes for a second in the hollow of his hand. . . . There they were again, the hours he wanted to forget and could not forget, ever. The sun beating down on the stretch of alang-alang grass. The small path, like a green tunnel drilling through the compactness of the fierce, hard, glittering blades. It almost closed over his head, but it came only up to Anderson's shoulders. A few leeches had been sticking to the hollows of Anderson's knees, he had seen them as he trekked behind him, and he himself had bent down and plucked them off. It was a ridiculous action, considering what happened afterwards. Anderson had turned back towards him and grinned at him and said in Danish: "Thanks, my good fellow." He

opened his eyes and returned to the game of chess. "Your move, Vandengraaf," he said, somewhat impatiently.

Vandengraaf stared at the board with an odd expression. He shook his head as if to ward off some mosquitoes. "Yes, yes," he muttered and moved his bishop. But the chess pieces disappeared before his eyes, they were blurred out, almost as in the movies when one scene is superimposed over another on the screen. The miniature drama of the chess game faded away and what Vandengraaf saw instead was a stretch of alang-alang grass, with the sun beating down on it. Through the tunnel-like path two men were trekking, the tall one a few steps ahead and the smaller one behind him. The smaller one stopped and bent down to pluck some leeches from the taller one's legs. The taller one turned around, grinned and said: "Thanks, my good fellow." Vandengraaf heard it, muffled like a sound travelling under water. Just as he recognized Anderson, Van Halden's hand came cutting through the grass . . . and there was the chessboard again.

Halden moved his queen's pawn. He looked watchfully at the mind-reader's face and asked: "What's the matter, Vandengraaf? Are you falling asleep?"

Vandengraaf shook his head. . . . Way back some natives with spears followed the men through the alang-alang, but they took care to let the distance between themselves and their masters grow more and more. At last they cowered down in the sweltering heat of the grass blades and let the two white men walk on alone, except for two, who carried rifles like Anderson and Halden. . . .

"Your move, Vandengraaf."

. . . There was a big rock where the path led into the jungle, and before the two men entered the dense grey dusk they stopped for a while . . . and the chessboard became once more distinct before the mind reader's eyes and he moved his knight with shaking fingers.

"Go on," said Halden.

". . . Go on," said Halden to Anderson, who stooped down to examine the tracks in the path, which was no wider than the feet of the natives had beaten it through the undergrowth. Vandengraaf saw the tall man straighten up again and heard clearly what he said: "This looks a bad business, Hendrick. . . ."

"And this and this and this. And now it's your move," Halden said to Vandengraaf. The mind reader struggled back from the jungle thicket to the chessboard and moved his bishop to the king's three.

"Are you ill?" Halden asked him, but the voice came to Vandengraaf from a far distance. "A little sunstroke, maybe," he murmured, and then the jungle closed over him again. Great beads of sweat oozed from his forehead and his breath came spasmodically. Suddenly his eyes rolled back, showing the white of the eyeball, like the eyes of a dying man. "Vandengraaf!" called Van Halden, upset, afraid Vandengraaf might suffer an epileptic attack.

". . . It's nearly dark now," Vandengraaf said, almost coughing the words. "He goes ahead and you follow. He stops under a huge Pandanus tree and touches the trunk. There are some tracks which I don't understand. I am not a hunter, but Anderson is. The sun rays are slanting, and now they are gone. He goes ahead of you. He stops and calls for the servants. There is no

answer. He wants to turn around and go back. You urge him forward. He laughs and pats your shoulder. There are the servants now; they point out the way with a small, old-fashioned lantern. Now he takes out his knife and hacks his way into the jungle. You follow him. Now he has reached a small clearing. There are a few rocks, he points to one. The servants have disappeared again. He helps you climb up that rock and install yourself behind the branches of some creeping shrub. He leaves you and crosses the clearing. He stops and reconnoitres after each step. He moves like a jungle animal himself. He looks around and signals to you. You wave your arm, you signal back. He walks on; where the clearing slopes down towards a stretch of swampy ground, he circles around in a loop. Now he stops. Now he stops. He freezes in his tracks. Oh—this is dreadful. . . .”

Vandengraaf's voice had become screechy, his body was convulsed as he laboured over every word that was wrested from him by some mysterious process. Halden, his hands clutched around his queen, listened, fascinated, almost hypnotized, unable to interrupt him, unable to break the spell. His thoughts raced ahead of the mind-reader's words, they raced back into the past, and the scene, which was indelibly etched into his brain, repeated itself in his memory once more.

“ . . . There is the tiger—I can see him—in the dusk—the goat was tied to a tree, but all that's left are rags of skin and the head with the horns and the bloody tangle of entrails on which the tiger feeds. Anderson has got the scent of the tiger—a second sooner than the tiger scents the man. A shot . . . what is it? Did you shoot? Why did you shoot? But now—now—the tiger snarls—

h, he crouches down—he is a streak of gold and black.

“ . . . Anderson shoots—he misses—he runs for his life, he screams at you to shoot—he stumbles across the clearing—he reaches a tree, he wants to scramble up the trunk—it is too late. ‘Shoot, shoot, Hendrick, why don’t you shoot?’ Another leap—that’s the end . . . ”

. . . Vandengraaf stared down at the man into whose flesh the claws of the animal tore. He stared up at the rock where Halden knelt, his rifle pointed, his face a mask, distorted by a dreadful, grimacing smile. Then there were two shots and the tiger leaped once, fell down on his side and stretched out over his mangled victim. Dark patches appeared on the greyish-green ground of the clearing, they spread and coagulated . . . and turned once more into the black-and-white pattern of the chess-board; there was still the swaying of jungle grass, and then it disappeared and left the figures of the game in front of Vandengraaf, and across the table he found Halden’s face, grimacing with the same mask-like, terrific smile.

“Your move,” Halden said, but his voice cracked and the two men stared at each other in a silence which seemed to have no end or bottom.

“What happened to me?” Vandengraaf asked at last, rubbing the back of his hand, which was dripping with sweat.

“Don’t you know?” Halden asked, *fighting for composure*. “You either fell into a trance—or you did a most admirable piece of acting for my benefit.”

Vandengraaf brushed the suggestion aside. “A trance?” he said, touching his dripping forehead, his soaked collar, his sunken eyes. “A trance? I’ve never

believed in trances. I've seen many and was always sure they were fake. I don't want to fall into a trance ever again. It was dreadful."

Halden watched him with tense attention. He felt almost sorry for Vandengraaf. He got up, snatched a towel from the washstand and flung it to the exhausted, stupefied mind reader. "Here, get yourself dry," he said gently. "It must be a strange experience for someone as disillusioned and cynical as you to get caught in something psychic."

"I feel as a woman might feel after a birth," Vandengraaf said, rubbing his neck and his forehead, which were covered at once with perspiration again. "All spent, all rattled."

"You'll forget it very quickly," Halden said, feeling his way. "I imagine it cannot be very different from having a high fever and becoming delirious. You forget it the moment you are well again. Do you want to rest now—or finish our game?"

Vandengraaf took his castle between his fingers and put it down again. He looked sharply at Halden. "You seem to have gone to pieces yourself, Mynheer," he said. "You look like a man who has *kurap*."

Kurap is a native disease which patterns the golden-brown skin of the natives with large pale patches. Halden shot a glance across the chessboard into the small mirror. Yes, he looked like a man who had *kurap*; his skin which had taken on the sun tan of a long ocean voyage was covered with uneven blotches that looked like the white spots on the map of some unexplored country.

"You gave me a little shock, Vandengraaf, that's all,"

he said. "Come, let's finish the game. It will—how did you express it?—soothe our nerves."

Vandengraaf moved his queen's knight and took a pawn from the board. Halden, with fumbling fingers, shoved his queen ahead; his hands trembled so violently that he knocked down two or three figures and had to pick them up and place them in position again. Vandengraaf whistled Saint-Saëns' "Danse Macabre."

"Don't whistle, man!" Halden said vehemently. "Or if you have to whistle, don't whistle that rotten lugubrious piece of music." Vandengraaf leaned back in his bunk and kept on whistling, straight into Halden's face.

"Imagine me, Alexander Vandengraaf, alias Blotzky, a professional mind reader, suddenly stumbling onto the discovery that I really can read minds!" he said after ending his piece with a flourish. "It must be the mood and atmosphere of this port which brought it out in me. Or some electromagnetic tension in the air which has to do with the storm. I can read minds. If I can read a complicated, complex mind like yours, Mynheer, it should be a cinch for me to read the simple mind of one's average contemporary."

"Of course you forgot what you saw in your trance the moment you came to?" Halden said lightly. He held his breath as he waited for Vandengraaf's answer.

"Strangely enough, no, Mynheer. I admit I remember only snatches, fragments, it's a jumble, it looks like a painting by Picasso, third period. But the fragments are very clear and very strong; they are burned into my mind. I am a nervous, sensitive person—and watching a tiger killing a man is something I could not forget. Could you?"

"No," Halden answered, almost against his will. A slow smile spread over Vandengraaf's harassed and drained features.

"So that is how you killed your best friend," he said, very gently, very softly.

"I did not kill him; the tiger did."

"Yes. It was as neat a trap as any man could conceive. You did not shoot the tiger—that was all. You did not shoot the tiger; you waited till he had done what you didn't dare do with your own hands."

"The tiger hunt was not my idea; it was his. I am no great hunter, but Anderson was. He was a great big, strutting, boastful he-man, and he was going to get the tiger singlehanded."

"You are still jealous of him! You still hate him! After how many years? You poor, crazy fool," Vandengraaf said, almost with pity.

"I did not kill him. I took as much of a chance as he did; the tiger might have attacked me as well as him. You are an atheist and a cynic, Blotzky. I don't want to talk of God to you—but there must be some—some higher law which decided between Anderson and myself—"

"Save your metaphysical excuses, they are wasted on me," Vandengraaf said, moving his knight to the bishop's three.

Halden responded automatically by taking the knight with his knight, and then he straightened up. "If you expect to blackmail me with the outcome of your psychic hokus-pokus, you must know that I would not hesitate to wreck your life and to make you ridiculous all over the Netherlands and the Indies," he said, a shadow of his former imperturbability.

Vandengraaf got up and went to the porthole, which unscrewed and opened. There were the sleepy night sounds of the small port outside: the lapping of water, the creaking of a native *perahu*, the clanking of a chain, the long-drawn call somewhere, and quiet again.

"The storm is over," Vandengraaf said. He came back and, pulling his trunk from under his berth, sat down on it so close to Halden that his shoulder touched the frail shoulder of the old man.

"Listen, Mynheer," he said, "you are an old man and a sick man and a lonely man, and you don't trust anyone in the world, not even your own daughter. If I didn't know that, I might feel hurt and even insulted by your rude suspicion; but, as it is, I feel only sorry for you. No, I wouldn't dream of blackmailing you, not if I had your confession, signed and sealed, in an official document. Don't you realize that I like you and that I want to help you? You have carried a heavy load with you for so many years. It has made you ill and has ruined your heart and has eaten you up and poisoned you inside like an infected sore. Now that your—your higher law has given me an involuntary glimpse into your secrets, why don't you take advantage of it? Talk to me, man, you will feel so much better if you can talk for once. I'm an atheist, but I believe like any good Catholic in the healing, merciful effect of confession."

Halden jerked his shoulder with a slight movement away from Vandengraaf's touch; he pushed his chair back, as much as the tight space of the cabin permitted. "I think I'll go on deck for a while," he muttered. But before he had reached the door, his hand went to his heart and he doubled over in sudden pain and fear. Van-

dengraaf was at his side and supported him back to his own bunk, where he put him down and opened his shirt with the experienced hands of one used to emergencies. First of all he pulled the door open and called down the corridor: "*Djongos!* Get Dr Maverick, quick!" Then he took the pillow from under Halden's head and put it under his feet, and as he saw with satisfaction that the blood slowly returned into the waxlike face, he proceeded to massage the old man's wrists and chest.

Halden opened his eyes and asked: "Is this—the end?"

"I don't think so," Vandengraaf replied, and the very dryness of his answer calmed Halden more than any exaggerated reassurances could have done. "A bit too much of a strain, that's all. I'm sorry if I am responsible for it."

"I need a caffen injection," Halden said. "I've had such an attack before. I might pull through this time—but the doctor warned me— I cannot stand many repetitions."

"Maverick and his syringe will be here in a moment," Vandengraaf said, anxiously glancing at the door. "And don't be afraid. Death is too unimportant a transition to be afraid of it. Besides, you don't want to give in just now. You want to be well when your daughter comes back, don't you?"

Halden closed his eyes again, and his strained breathing eased and became regular. "Don't go away," he said as Vandengraaf moved. "Stay with me—my friend. I've never had a friend—since Anderson died," he added with a flicker of his wry smile.

Vandengraaf suppressed an imperative urge to whistle something simple and consoling, Brahms's "*Wiegen-*

ed," for instance, as he kept on kneading Halden's wrist. Suddenly the old man began to talk.

"I loved Theresa too much, that was my only fault," he began, "and I may have loved her with the wrong love. Possessive. Jealous to the point of exclusion of anything that was not myself. Jealous when she stroked the cat. When she smiled at the *babu*. When she closed her eyes to the scent of a flower. Then I passed through the seven hells of suspicion. The sudden silence when I entered a room where people had talked about me. The taste of a cigarette on her lips which was not my cigarette. Little things, intangible and lighter than air. One evening I came home from the plantation earlier than she expected me. The door to the *klamboe* room was locked, and the *babu* looked at me with a strange expression when I stood at that door. There was some whispering going on inside, and then I heard Anderson laugh. I heard him laugh, in our bedroom, behind closed doors, and I wanted to break into the room and kill him then. But I did not do it. I went away and ran around for hours. There was a storm like tonight's which finally drove me home. Then I talked to Theresa and she did not lie. She did not even try to make excuses. She loved Anderson and that was that. She asked me to give her a divorce so that she could marry him. She said she was glad I had found out about them at last. She wanted to marry him—but he was married. He was a scoundrel, to him women were unimportant. He might even have left his wife and married Theresa, but I knew he would have made her miserable. At last she cried herself to sleep on my shoulder. The next morning I left before she woke up, and I drove up to Kintang in the mountains, where

he had gone to inspect some of his coffee plantations. I did not know what I would say to him or what I would do to him. When I arrived there, the village was in great commotion, because the tiger had killed a boy two nights before. The tiger had molested Kintang for quite some while, and now the villagers had decided to hunt him down. Anderson went around the village strutting and boasting and telling them they should stay home with their puny spears; he, the great white *tuan*, would kill the tiger for them. I hated him. Lord, how I hated him! He invited me to join him in the hunt, but he did it in such a way, so ironically, as if he were certain I would not have the courage to accept. Well, I accepted. When I came home to Theresa and told her that Anderson had been killed by a tiger, she fainted and fell into a brain fever. She never recovered from it; she remained an invalid in a wheel chair, paralyzed in mind and body. We never could talk to each other again. I could never prove to her that I was a better man than Anderson, that I could make her happier than he could ever have made her. I gave up Tanatua, I took her to Europe, I travelled from one place to another, from one great doctor to another, in vain, until she died. That is my whole story. Now all I have left is Jeff—and fate seems to have a great and strange sense of humour: it's Anderson again who wants to take my little girl away from me."

Halden opened his eyes and looked into Vandengraaf's face which was closely bent over him. He began to smile. "No great wonder my heart gives out once in a while. I am not a very happy man, Vandengraaf, not a very happy man, believe me."

"I may not be the right person to preach morals,"

Vandengraaf said, responding with the same sort of smile, a mellow smile full of experience, knowledge of men, self-irony, and freedom from all conventions. "But, Halden, you cannot kill a man and be happy." He got up and went to the door, to look down the corridor. "I wonder where Maverick is keeping himself," he muttered.

"Never mind the doctor, I am feeling much better," Halden said from his bunk. "Shall we finish our game now?"

"As you please," Vandengraaf answered; the chess-board had been swept off the table when Halden collapsed, and the chessmen were all over the floor and under the bed. Vandengraaf picked them up and systematically arranged them as they had been when they had left off. Halden watched him with obvious pleasure. The shuffle of bare feet came down the corridor, stopped in front of the door, and there was the usual polite scraping and coughing before the cabin boy made his entrance.

"Well?" said Vandengraaf.

"The *tuan* doctor had to go to the hospital because there are many sick coolies to be treated," he reported. "There was a great fire in Lombok and a great flood in Kuri Valley. The gods seem to be very angry at everybody. Even the *tuan besar* has been wounded." Proud to be the bearer of such momentous news, he bowed with folded hands and left. Halden, propped up on Vandengraaf's bunk, held his queen poised in his fingers. Then the boy remembered something and came back once more.

"The young *nonja* sent a message for the *tuan*," he recited with downcast eyes. "These are the words she

put into the mouth of a Chinese man, a certain Fong, who returned to the boat with burns on his hands and legs: 'Do tell my father not to harbour worry about me in his liver. I want to help the sick and the poor in the hospital, but I will return to the boat before the Sun-God leaves his house in the East and brings the morning with him.' "

Having thus embellished Jeff's simple message, the boy bowed again and left, this time for good. "That sounds just like Jeff," Halden said, flabbergasted and yet amused. "Don't you envy the Malays who have no heart, but only a liver?"

Vandengraaf scrutinized him with another quick and worried glance. "I could give you your caffein injection if you would accept me as a worthy substitute for Dr Maverick," he suggested. But Mynheer Van Halden shook his head.

"I am all right," he said. "Let's finish the game. Your move, friend Vandengraaf."

II

THE GOVERNMENT'S HOSPITAL in Sebang consisted of a central bungalow for ambulant treatments, surrounded by a scattered group of smaller bungalows for the natives, each one containing one ward. Another bungalow, airier and well separated, stood ready for such white people as would trust their health to Dr Grader. Whoever could manage it, though, preferred to journey to one of the big cities of Java to have tonsils or appendixes removed and gall-bladder trouble treated. The general

relief of the natives ran to the conclusion that one was taken to the hospital for the single purpose of dying—or rather to be killed by the methods of the doctor, which were entirely lacking in magic, charms, offerings and similar well-proven ways of appeasing gods, demons and evil spirits which caused sickness and disease.

Thus the coolies from Lombok who were taken off the ruck and deposited outside the surgery were a sad sight. Two native nurses, slim and neat in their black sarongs and white *badjus*, but sleepy and frightened by the unexpected emergency, moved between them, propelling them in small groups into Dr Grader's sanctuary. Soon the stone floor of the open waiting hall was covered with red splashes that looked like blood but were only red betel juice which was spat around profusely. To a native of the East Indies there is no greater consolation in distress than a wad of betel wrapped with a chunk of calcium into a leaf of the sirih tree. If only the wounded coolies could have put up a gambling board on the floor, they might have been completely *senang*, happy and content, notwithstanding their burns and pains and their drenched and soaked and thoroughly wretched condition.

The doctor had been summoned from Ann Foster's house, where he had gone to look after little Jan, who had fallen ill so suddenly. As Ann was almost insane with fear over the little Governor's condition and Dr Grader himself was alarmed by the sudden attack of high fever, he had loaded Ann, the *babu* and the little boy into his *carreta* and taken them along to the hospital. Unaware of Ann's hatred and suspicion against his housekeeper Sitah, he had left them in her care in his private bunga-

low, while he hurried off to give the coolies first aid, to place the badly injured ones into hospital cots and in the meantime to test little Jan's blood for malaria.

It was so quiet in the room where Ann and the *babu* stayed with the sick child that the sound of a lizard snatching an insect from the wall sounded loud and menacing. The storm had subsided, and the air drifting through the open windows was loaded with the moisture and the scent of the garden outside. Ann hated this scent; it seemed to her as if it would choke her little son, aggravate his fever, carry millions of bacteria along in its streaming, steaming hothouse warmth. She stood at the window, still wearing the green brocade and the silver slippers, and looked into the garden; she hated the palms, the trees, the abundance of tropical flowers, all that vile fecund growth and beauty, which shot up even in a hospital back yard. You planted a garden today and a year later it had become a jungle. You put your child to bed with warm, pink cheeks and at midnight it was dying with fever.

Little Jan whimpered and stirred. She went to the *babu*, who held him on her lap, to take him away from her. But the *babu* held onto the feverish little bundle and shook her head with a hidden meaning. Ann followed the direction of the *babu's* glance and grew cold with apprehension. Sitah had entered the room, soundless on her bare feet, her eyes downcast; her tight little *badju* stood open and showed the faultless lines of her round, small breasts. She carried a tray with bottles and glasses and put them down on the table. She left the room and came back with a bowl of roasted nuts. She smiled at Ann

timidly and made an inviting gesture. Every movement of hers looked like a fragment from an ancient dance.

"The little *tuan* will get well again, Mem," she said softly, stopping to look at the Governor. The *babu* quickly pulled the blanket over his face, baring her teeth like a mother monkey defending her baby. She uttered a few hoarse words which Ann did not understand, and Sitah bowed again and left the room. A few minutes later the child began to suffer new chills, and his little pink gums with the proud six teeth chattered violently.

"The she-dog, she put an evil curse on the little *tuan*," the *babu* grumbled.

"Give me the child and get the *tuan* doctor, quick," Ann cried in alarm. After the *babu* had scurried from the room, she sat down, with the little burden in her arms. She had a weird feeling of having lived through all this before and knowing everything that was ahead of her: the fear, the hope, the struggle, the catastrophe; the last gasp, the sudden silence; the little gravestone: here lies Jan Foster, who died at the age of eleven months. She would have liked to pray, but it seemed to her that God was too far away; He had remained in Holland, in the clean whitewashed church of her childhood, and her mind was empty of the words which might call Him to this remote island.

It was not Dr Grader whom the *babu* ushered in on her return, but a redheaded, lean, tall man whom Ann remembered having seen before, although she did not know when and where.

"I'm Dr Maverick," he said. "Knowing the reputation of ships' doctors, I am ashamed to admit that I am the doctor from the *Tjaldane*. However, with only one

government doctor in town it is just as well that I am around tonight. Grader is very busy at the moment setting the broken bones of a few coolies. He sent me to tell you not to worry too much about your little boy. It's not malaria, but there seems to be some spironemes rampant. Grader tells me the baby never had this fever before, and, of course, the first attack is very fierce. But don't be frightened by the symptoms. It's not at all dangerous."

"Not dangerous," Ann said bitterly. "That's what the doctors said before. Not dangerous—and both my babies died. Of something that was not dangerous."

The *babu* looked from Ann's lips to Maverick's lips, as if to read the meaning of the English words she could not understand. The doctor took the child from Ann with the awkward grip of a sworn bachelor. "Cute little feller," he said with appreciation, smiling down at the hot, puckered face.

"Where are you taking him? What are you doing to him? Why don't you give him quinine, or Artebrin or something?" Ann said vehemently.

"Quiet, quiet, little woman," Maverick said. "Quinine wouldn't do. What he needs is a teeny-weeny bit of salvarsan; that will end the attack for once and all. If he doesn't get a new infection, that is."

"Salvarsan? I don't understand? What infection?" Ann said with quivering, blanched lips. I'm dizzy, she thought. I don't want to faint. She reached for the bottle of Holland gin on the tray, poured some feverishly into a glass and gulped a large swallow. "That's right," Maverick said with a nod of satisfaction. "Nothing better than a spot of alcohol if you feel weak around the knees. You know, it seems to me you need the doctor more than

our little man here. He'll be all right in a jiffy. It's a Relapsing Fever—no more, no less. Very common and quite harmless. Did you never hear of it?"

A small rainbow of hope appeared on Ann's horizon. There was just a faint possibility that little Jan would not die, not yet, not this time. "A Relapsing Fever?" she whispered.

"Yes, but we won't get a relapse; the Salvarsan takes care of that."

"How did he get it?"

"A so-called filth infection, if you don't mind the term. I suppose his *babu* has lice, and they carry the spironemes."

"The *babu*?" Ann said, flabbergasted. "The *babu*? Impossible. She is so good, and so devoted to the Governor."

"Yes, but did you ever search her for lice?"

"No, but I don't believe it. It's impossible."

Dr Maverick shrugged and went to the door, with the whimpering baby in his arms. He had not much patience with stupid and hysterical mothers who did not have enough sense to inspect the native servants for vermin. But Ann clung to his sleeve. "I am going with you. I want to hold him, I want to be there when he gets this—this dreadful Salvarsan. Will you hurt him, Doctor? I don't want him to get hurt," she clamoured. She herself had received some intravenous Salvarsan injections as a preventive against malaria, and she hated the treatment. Only now Maverick remembered that he had taken another delicate mission upon himself. He stopped at the door to break the bad news to her with as much tact as he could summon.

"Listen, little lady," he said, "you'd better stay here

and brace yourself with another jigger of gin. Our little boy will be fine in no time. But you've heard that there was some trouble in Lombok? Well, it seems your husband has been hurt, and you may be needed as soon as they bring him to the hospital. I advise you to save your strength for him and forget about the baby for the time being."

"Oh, is he hurt?" Ann asked. "Badly."

Maverick hesitated with his answer. He sadly realized that during the years on the *Tjaldane* he had lost the finer points of his profession, that glowing optimism, that rubbing of hands and clearing of the throat, that polite art of evading the direct answer and of nursing hope against hope in the hearts of relatives, parents and wives.

"Look here," he said, "I might as well tell you the worst. A man ran amuck and stabbed your husband in the abdomen. That's all we know so far. Whether it's really bad we'll find out the moment we get him on the table. But a knife in the intestines is no joke under any circumstances. Well, as I said before, you must keep your chin up."

During this speech the doctor had edged towards Ann, because he wanted to be at hand in case she should faint this time. But she took the cruel news superbly. She did not scream, she did not turn white, she did not even need more gin. "He will be all right," she said instead. "He is very strong."

Dr Maverick, with little Jan on his arm, beat his retreat. He had spent too much time with her as it was; Grader needed an assistant, coolie children with severe burns were more important than the little white boy with his harmless fever. Traversing the steaming garden,

where every palm leaf glittered like a blade of silver, Maverick shook his head. Strange race, women, he thought. Incomprchensible race! Making a great fuss over a few spironemes, but acting like a Spartan heroine at the news of her husband's life being in danger. Funny, funny, funny race!

Ann had remained in the room, dazed and stunned. The blood gets thinner in the tropics, that was what people often said to her. She could almost feel this thin blood trickling slowly and listlessly in her veins. She had used up every drop of her imagination in picturing all the horrible things that might happen to little Jan. That was why she was unable to imagine her husband hurt, her husband suffering, her husband in danger. He was the *tuan besar*, a strong, brutal stranger with a yellow moustache, to whom she was married.

Sitah entered again, and Ann noticed only now that the *babu* had sneaked from the room when Maverick had taken the baby away. Most probably she was squatting now in front of the surgery door, faithful and vigilant, lest some evil spell should be cast over her baby. "May I speak to the Mem?" Sitah asked in her soft, singing voice, accentuating the last syllable of each word, as was characteristic of the dialect of her province.

"Yes, what is it?" Ann asked, disturbed. Sitah had changed into a much simpler sarong now and wore the white *badju* befitting a servant girl.

"I will take money and offerings to the priest," Sitah said. "He will beg the gods not to take the life of the *tuan besar*." Sitah was not a Mohammedan, she came from the mountains where the people still believed in the indigenous gods of the island. "The *tuan besar* has been

very good to Sitah," she added as if to explain her extraordinary step. Ann hardly listened. It seemed to her as if she could hear her little son crying, far across the garden. Sitah too listened. "He is arriving," she said and glided from the room, soundlessly slithering like a snake. The scent of her hair oil and her flowers remained in the air. Now Ann too perceived the sounds which heralded Charley's car, but she saw no connection between these spitting, coughing and utterly humorous noises and the arrival of her husband. In fact, she had forgotten Charley to the point of annihilation, ever since the *babu* had come to the boat to report about the sickness of the child. She frowned, trying to remember why there was a bad taste at the thought of Charley. Oh yes, he had told her that he loved her and then he had left the boat with the girl that decidedly was no lady. All this had happened long ago, for this night had been an endless eternity. Ann lifted her arm to her lips to suck the blood from the mosquito bites which she had scratched open. There was a commotion somewhere in the jumble of bungalows, suppressed calls, the soft thud of bare feet, a banging of doors. Ann overcame her unwillingness to move, to change her position, to do something. She gathered the train of her brocade dress and, cautiously crossing the dark garden, reached the main bungalow, only to find the door of the surgery closed. Sitah stood in front of it, and in her hands she held Jan Foster's soiled pith helmet.

"Is-is the *tuan besar* inside?" Ann asked the girl. Sitah answered only by a lifting of her eyebrows, meaning "yes" in the sign language of the natives.

"Let me pass, I must go inside," Ann said.

Sitah bowed apologetically. "The Mem is requested to

wait outside," she said politely. "The *tuan* Ellington is inside with the *tuan besar*; he is giving him his own blood so that his strength might flow into the veins of the *tuan besar* and make him able to fight death."

Ann looked at the girl with a troubled expression. Then it dawned on her that Sitah spoke of a blood transfusion and that Charley was the donor. The happenings of this endless night became more and more confused and incomprehensible.

"And where is my baby?" she asked, but Sitah paid no attention to the question.

"I begged the *tuan* doctor to take my blood and give it to the *tuan besar*, but he laughed at me and said that the blood of a woman would make him weak instead of strong," she said humbly.

It was the first time in all these years that Ann had spoken to her husband's former *njai*, and this too was part of the fleeting and blurred and nightmarish events of the night. "How late is it?" she asked, absent-mindedly.

"The cocks will crow within the hour," Sitah replied darkly. It was past three o'clock, for the cocks began to crow at four, but this Ann did not know.

"Where is my baby?" she asked again, and again Sitah gave no answer. Ann looked around. The waiting room was open on two sides, where the roof of corrugated iron rested on posts. Most official buildings were designed like this, because it was advisable to keep waiting natives, their chewing, coughing, smoking and spitting, their conversations and their mixed smells and perfumes, in a well-ventilated place. A few coolies were squatting near the steps which led down to the front lawn, waiting to be treated. They looked bad enough with their smudged

faces and their burned rags, and there was the bitter odour of fire around them. They waited patiently, and if they suffered pain their faces did not show it. Suddenly Ann was aware of her feet in the silver slippers being so tired that she could hardly stand up any longer. She looked around, but there was no bench, because this place was not designed to accommodate white patients. Sitah disappeared and returned a moment later with a chair which she placed near the door. Ann sat down. The mingled murmur of voices pierced through the door, and once she heard Jan Foster shout: "*Godverdomme*, that's enough!"

It sounded most normal, and Sitah gave Ann a fleeting, strangely confidential smile as if to say: The *tuan besar* cannot be very ill.

"Where is my *babu*?" Ann asked worriedly.

Sitah's face lighted up in a smile of triumph; it was as if the reflection of a torch flickered across her finely chiselled features. "The *tuan* doctor with the red hair sent her away. He shouted at her and he bade her not to touch the little *tuan*. He called her unclean and threatened to put her in a bath of kerosene and shamed her into running away and hiding herself," she said; a bubble of laughter burst in her throat as she remembered the old *babu* flopping off in dismay, like a big, lame, angry bat.

The *babu*'s disappearance made the helpless loneliness around Ann wide and deep like an ocean of black ink. She buried her head in her hands, to see nothing, to hear nothing. From time to time she scratched her legs, for this was a great night for the mosquitoes; then the cocks began to crow.

Sometime later somebody touched her shoulder and

she looked up. It was the grouchy, heavy Dutch head nurse, Dewitte, who had come outside to bring little Jan back to her. The moment Ann took him in her arms he began to cry violently, as if to complain about the things they had done to him. A little piece of adhesive tape was pasted in the crook of his elbow, where the intravenous injection had entered the vein. Ann pressed a desperate kiss onto the little wound.

"What shall I do now?" she asked the nurse.

"Stay here; you will be wanted soon," the nurse answered, unfriendly, and went off again.

Ann cradled little Jan in her arms and tried to hum a little Dutch song to him. He was still boiling with fever, his lips were dark and dry, his breathing rapid and laboured. Ann covered him with the small mosquito net which the nurse had brought along and waited in a stupor. When she looked up, the world had changed. The moon had waned and taken all the silver, all the glitter and glint of the night, with it; the sounds of cicadas and crickets, frogs and mad night birds had ceased and left a deep silence in the air. It was grey outside, and heavy white shrouds of mist floated across the front lawn like ghosts. Then the sound of an approaching motor car broke into the stillness and a tunnel of light was drilled into the thinning darkness. Out of the mist came the car, shapeless and very big, but shrinking to its normal size as it turned into the driveway and stopped in front of the open hall.

"That's the place," Anders Anderson said, jumping from the car. "Give me the child."

Jeff answered with a limp smile. "Chivalry doesn't go very well with a cut-up hand like yours," she said.

Anders looked reproachfully at his right hand, bandaged with the remnants of his own best white ducks which were soaked and brown with dried blood. Jeff left the car, holding little Wajang tightly to herself. Pat was leaning over the wheel in a pose of utter exhaustion, looking for all the world like the stroke oar of a victorious crew after the finish of the regatta.

"Pat darling," Anders said softly to her, "come in and take a rest while I get stitched up. Dr Grader has the best gin in town—and you need it."

Ann Foster looked wonderingly at the strange trio as they ascended the steps which led into the hall. They seemed cheerful and innocently unaware of their own condition. But they looked like nothing on earth, dirty, wet, dishevelled and in rags. She recognized Anders Anderson only by his six-foot-four height and the characteristic way in which he bent his head on entering the hall, as if he were afraid to bump against the iron roof.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs Foster," he said and stopped. "Is— How is the *tuan besar*? I mean—is he—"

"He will be all right," Ann said, slowly coming out of her stupor. "But little Jan is very ill. Very ill, Mr Anderson."

Jeff, with her own sick boy in her arms, bent down to the baby on Ann's lap. Ann shrank back imperceptibly, as if the proximity of the coolie child might bring more danger and contagion.

"There is a lot of fight in these little fellows," Jeff said consolingly, but Ann shook her head. She knew better. She had buried two of them.

"Not in white children who have been born in the tropics," she said. Since Dr Maverick had accused the

faithful *babu* of having infected the Governor, the last vestige of her life had been shattered.

"What are we waiting for?" Pat asked impatiently. "You have to be taken care of, Mr Anderson. Does it hurt an awful lot?"

It did, of course, but Anderson was not willing to admit it. He looked from the feverish baby on Ann's lap to little Wajang, who seemed to have fallen into a coma, and on to the passive, wounded coolies squatting on the floor. "I'd say it's a bit crowded here tonight," he said. "Sometimes poor Dr Grader can't catch even a single native patient for his statistics for weeks on end because the families are hiding them from him. Then they come in clusters like this. There is another truckload to be expected soon. Well, let's get in line. *Tabeh*, Sitah—any chance to see how the *tuan besar* is doing?"

"He is getting a blood transfusion," Ann said. "From Charley—he is in there with him."

"That's Charley all over," Anders said. "I remember now. He told me once that he worked his way through college partly by being a donor of blood, three English pounds per transfusion. He should have experience. Jeff — Where the hell is Jeff now?"

She had been at his side a second ago, but had spied one of the native nurses, who supported two bandaged coolies down the garden path to one of the wards. Without much hesitation she followed them and spoke to the nurse, using all her newly acquired Malay; and so strong was her power of persuasion that a few minutes later little Wajang was placed in a hospital cot and lined up for first consideration as soon as Dr Grader would be through with the *tuan besar*. Meanwhile a chorus of

chirping morning birds had started to usher in the dawn while the sepia colours of the garden turned to grey and the mists grew heavier over the lawn. A new rumbling came down the street.

"There they are now," Anders said as the truck came to a screeching halt and another flock of coolies, with lesser injuries than the first, was led up the steps.

Pat observed them with a grim smile. "I guess you'll wait until all of them have been treated, Mr Anderson," he said. "You'll wait till you have a nice case of blood poisoning from that dirty knife. Lord, I know you won't listen to me. Maybe I'd better get Miss Halden, seems she is the only one to have anything to say with you."

"I'll look for her myself," Anders said hurriedly.

God, how crazy he is about that girl, Pat thought. He can't stay away from her for five minutes. What'll he do after she's gone? "Okay," she said resignedly. "I saw her go into that bungalow over there."

Just as Anderson went on his way, Charley appeared in the door of the surgery, which he quickly closed. He too had a bit of adhesive tape on his arm, and he looked his own cheerful self, even though his eyebrows were gone.

"Hello, Flagpole," he greeted Anders.

"Hello, Doodlebug," Anders replied. "How is the *tuau besar*?" he added, serious.

"Holding his own bravely," Charley said. "Hello, Pat, sorry you got a wrong impression of the peaceful seclusion of Lombok and all that. Ann, good old girl, d'you think you could give Batara Guru a little refreshing talk? He wants to see you and the Governor before they make him sniff his anesthetic. It's good luck Dr Maverick is in

port tonight: he'll perform the operation; as Grader admits himself, he's no shining light as a surgeon. Come, come now. There is not much time to lose."

He propelled Ann through the door, while Anders went on his way to look for Jeff. Pat sank onto the chair which Ann had left. The second the door opened to admit Ann with her baby, ushered in by Charley, Pat snatched a glimpse of Dr Maverick, and this one glimpse was strangely assuring and consoling; it was the first familiar and friendly sight in an endless succession of horrors. He stood in front of a washbasin, scrubbing his hands and arms. He was dressed in a white doctor's coat and his face looked intent, very different from his everyday face. To Pat he appeared in this flash like the hero of many a picture she had seen, and she felt a sudden, surprising desire to be close to him and feel safe. So strong was this desire that, after a moment's hesitation, she got up, went to the door and sneaked into the surgery.

"Well!" said Dr Maverick. "So that's where one has to look for you. I've wondered all the time what had happened to you."

He went on scrubbing his hands and seemed to forget her presence instantaneously.

"Did you?" she asked.

"What?" he asked back.

"Did you really wonder what happened to me?"

"Yes. Funny, isn't it? I should have known that you had nine lives like a cat."

She stared at his hands, which were covered with lather and did not look like the same hands she had got to know quite well on the boat. Not like the shaking hands which had poured whisky for her every day.

"Are you going to operate on him?" she asked. He nodded, rinsing his arms and studying his short nails with concentrated attention. "Is he very bad?" she went on. Suddenly she felt tears well up and blur her sight. What's this big Dutchman to me that I should cry over him? she thought. But she knew that she was not crying about Jan Foster and his suffering. She managed to tuck her tears away, to dump them somewhere into that big pool of tiredness inside of her, she sniffed once or twice and then she smiled brightly at the doctor. He did not return her smile, but looked at her quite seriously and with an odd sort of curiosity. Pat shuffled her feet, embarrassed. "There's quite a rush at this hospital tonight," she said. "I mean—couldn't I do something, too? They seem to be a bit short of nurses, aren't they? Maybe you could use me for something, Doc?"

He looked her over from head to toe, and now he began to grin. "You?" he said. "You, Pat?" He shook his head. "No, my girl, an operation is such a mess it would make you faint."

"It wouldn't," said Pat.

He looked her over once more, with that new serious expression, as if he had never seen her before. "Maybe it wouldn't," he said then. "Okay, if you want to help, report to Dewitte. I suppose she'll have a lot of dirty work for you to do, scrubbing the coolies clean and making beds for them. But now you must leave me alone, I've no time for you."

Pat left the room hesitantly. At the door she turned around and stole another glance at him. She was not so tired as she had been a few minutes ago and not so lonely. It was good to know that Dr Maverick was

ere to take care of things and to save everybody's life.

In the meantime Charley had crossed the surgery with Ann and arrived at the door of the operating room. "I say, Ann," he said, "I had a good palaver with Batara Guru on the way from Lombok. I don't want to sound rude, but he was taken down a peg or two. It seemed rather a good psychological moment to talk sense to him. After his experience of tonight, he seems more than willing to let you and the Governor go away for a while." He searched her face, and as she looked entirely blank, as if she hadn't understood his words, he shook her gently. "Look here, Ann—you are prepared for a little shock, aren't you?" he asked her, holding her back for another moment in front of the door which led into the small operating room. "And you will not get hysterical? He needs every grain of his strength for the operation, you realize that, don't you? How much time do you give her, Doctor?"

"Five minutes," Dr Maverick said, scrubbing his arms. The big Dutch nurse came in, ready to tie his mask and cap. In the corner Dr Grader lined up the surgical instruments. It all looked grim and intense, and only at this moment was Ann touched by a faint realization of the seriousness of her husband's condition.

"Ready? Go!" Charley said, as if starting her in an athletic event.

"Aren't you coming with me, Charley?" Ann whispered imploringly. He shook his head, turned the door-knob and shoved her in.

Ann had braced herself for a shock, but what she found inside was far from frightening. First of all it was much cooler here than outside, as two ventilators were

working overtime. The room was very clean and the electric lights were very bright, much brighter than in any of the houses she knew in Sebang, even brighter than in the *tuan* resident's mansion. In spite of all this cleanliness and the hospital odour, the familiar smell of Jan Foster's cigar dominated. He sat propped up on a stretcher, dressed in a funny, childish sort of nightshirt, and he smoked his cigar. It was this cigar which gave Ann a definite feeling that he could not be in great danger. "How are you, Jan?" she said, working a smile into her tired face.

Jan Foster, nicely doped with atropine and morphine, had reached the pleasant condition in which patients don't care a damn about anything. He was floating along without much pain and with no fear at all. He saw everything extremely clearly, though as if it were happening far away. He looked expectantly at Ann, who approached him from a very great distance but came closer with unbelievable speed. She carried the Governor in her arms, and as she was not used to doing this, the servants having saved her every tiniest effort in all these years, her muscles had become slack and her little son seemed to get heavier every minute. One of the native nurses stood like a sentinel between her and the stretcher. "Please, Mem, don't touch him," she said softly, but proud of the strict observance of rules for keeping things sterile around the patient.

"*Godverdomme*," Jan Foster said, "I want to see my son. That's not asking too much, is it?" He brushed the nurse aside, grimaced at a blunt stab of pain, which was dulled by the hypodermic but unpleasant all the same, and motioned Ann to come quite close. He pulled the

mosquito netting from little Jan's face and then looked at his son for a few seconds, which seemed very long and very still. Then he poked his big, spadelike forefinger into the soft, hot little cheek, as was his habit. The Governor promptly opened his eyes and looked at his father with the serious and fathomless expression peculiar to babies and nocturnal monkeys.

"He has got the fever," Foster said.

"Yes. Jan. But the doctor thinks it is nothing serious."

Foster contemplated the child for another few seconds. The nurse coughed a polite warning to Ann. Suddenly little Jan seemed to recognize his father: he opened his dry, cracked lips, showed his pink gums with the six teeth in a pitiful little smile and produced his bit of Malay: "Papa, Papa, *Apa, Apa*." Foster laughed contentedly, but his laughter turned into a hoarse, muffled sort of cough and he pressed his hands to his abdomen. Ann covered the little face again. The child began to whimper and the nurse wanted to take him from her; but Ann held onto the hot little bundle of fever.

"I have to talk to you, Ann," Foster said curtly. "Have the *babu* take the Governor outside. This is no place for a sick baby."

"The *babu* isn't here, Jan."

"Why not, damn it? You're pampering the servants, that's why they are never there when they are needed. Sitah, you take the Governor and wait outside for the Mem."

Ann had not noticed Sitah. But there she was all of a sudden, slender neck, folded hands, humble smile and all. Ann clutched the baby to herself, as if Sitah's touch would kill it instantaneously. Sitah looked at the *tuan*

besar for further orders. "No, no, no, don't let her carry him," Ann whispered desperately.

"You and your hysterical nonsense!" Foster said. "*Goono-goono*, eh? Sitah, you take the baby and go."

Sitah took the baby and went. Ann closed her eyes so as not to see them, wondering why she had let go of little Jan. Her husband scrutinized her green brocade dress with a mocking yet almost pleased expression. "You look darned nice in your finery," he said. Again he saw every smallest detail, so utterly clear as never before. "So you went to the party after all? You never do what you are told to do. Well, what do I care!" he said drowsily.

"How do you feel, Jan?" Ann asked again.

"I'm fine," he said. He was all filled up with dope and the pleasant, all-pervading feeling that he didn't care. He simply didn't care. He was a bit cold and a bit tight around his belly but he didn't care.

"Listen, Ann," he said, snatching her back from the distance into which she suddenly seemed to melt again. "Listen: I don't want you to stay in Sebang, not for another day. It's enough that I've got a hole in my belly big enough to put your fist in. I don't want you to stay in a place where any mad dog of a coolie might stick a knife into you. I don't want the Governor to be ill, and the doctor tells me all he needs is a change of climate. Here is what I want you to do: pack a few things, take the Governor and go aboard the *Tjaldane*, right now, at once. Don't stare at me like an idiot, do what I tell you!"

"But Jan—" Ann began. Immediately Foster's pale forehead turned pink in a rush of anger. Charley's blood in his veins, Ann couldn't help thinking.

"I don't want any back talk now," he bellowed at her.

Don't tell me you can't pack a suitcase tonight. You sail with the *Tjaldane*, go to Manila and back—nothing better than sea air for the Governor just now. Meanwhile it'll be better and then we'll see further. Maybe I'll take a few weeks' vacation and we'll all go to Brastagi. Or on leave to Holland. I'm sick and tired of this place anyway—I've had enough of trying to make a crazy bunch of monkeys work. Let the company pay me for a nice, long vacation after what I've been through tonight—they carry a nice, fat insurance, anyway. *Godverdomme*, I don't care one way or the other."

Ann looked at the nurse. She was dazed and stunned, and she wondered if Foster was delirious. The nurse gave her a sign to leave the room. Ann stood there, unresolved, her useless hands hanging limply at her sides, not knowing what to do.

"I'd rather stay with you after the operation," she said finally.

"I don't care about the operation. Let them cut out my guts and the whole mess inside of me. Maybe a man is better off in the tropics without his guts anyhow." Again he gave that short, muffled cough which was meant to be a laugh. "Where are you going?" he shouted, as Ann sailed away from him and left him alone with the white sheets which billowed around him and wanted to choke him.

"I'm here, Jan, right here," he heard her say from very far away, but at the same moment, strangely, her hand touched his forehead and he caught it quickly and held it in his own big hands.

"You would go away without even saying good-bye. And without money or anything," he said. "That's you.

Stupid. Impractical. I gave Charley my wallet, he will arrange everything." Great God, he thought, what will she do without me? He wanted to say something kind to her, something she would remember as his last word and tell the Governor when he was a big boy. But Jan Foster, unused to expressing any finer emotions, found no words. "I wanted to tell you something—wait," he said. "Yes, now I remember. I carry a life insurance for fifty thousand guilders. The policy is in the safe in my office. If I should die—"

He stopped and tried to concentrate. He was very cold and very sleepy now. "Listen, Ann," he said. "I'm sorry, you know, for a lot of things. Get out now, I want to sleep. Take good care of the Governor—he'll get well—on the boat—do what I tell you."

Nurse Dewitte opened the door with her elbows and admitted the two doctors, all bundled up in white for the operation. She followed them, her face grim and set behind her muzzle. She always got sick at operations and hated herself for her lack of strength and gumption. No one paid any attention to Ann as she crept out of the door. Charley was waiting for her in the surgery.

"Well?" he said after one look into her strained and tired face.

"He wants me to go off on the *Tjaldane*, Charley. I don't quite understand it. It's so sudden."

"Yes, I hoped he would," Charley said. "It's a very sensible decision on his part. I'll help you to pack your bag."

"Don't you think I should stay here and wait till after the operation?"

"No, I don't think so—really, Ann, I don't. Orders are

orders, and you know how angry Batara Guru gets if his orders are not obeyed."

"What sort of an operation is it? What are they going to do to him?"

"I don't know exactly. Open up the wound, clean it, cut out whatever parts may be damaged and stitch it all up."

"Is it very bad?"

"No, it's all only half as bad as it sounds. Come now, here's a good girl. You look terribly fagged, I'll take you home."

"He seemed quite well. He even swore at me," Ann said hesitatingly, looking at the closed door.

"Certainly. He has the strength of an ox." He was anxious to get her away, for he knew how horribly some people could scream while they went under. Ann Foster didn't look as if she could stand much more. "Don't you want to see what Sitah is doing with the Governor?" he said, congratulating himself on this stroke of pure genius; for Ann straightened up at once, marshalled her last reserves and said furiously: "If she has done him any harm I'll strangle her with my own hands, as sure as I'm alive, Charley."

He took her elbow and led her through the dripping, dawning garden to Dr Grader's bungalow.

III

PAT WAS ASLEEP on the couch. Anders Anderson and Jeff were sitting on the gallery, silent and smoking, and

Charley saw with one glance that the bandage on Anders' right hand had been renewed. On the threshold Sitah squatted, humming a little Malayan cradlesong over little Jan who slept in her lap. When she saw Ann coming up the steps, she got up, careful not to awaken the child, and put him gently in her arms.

"Joy, *Nonja*," she said softly. "The little prince is getting well."

Ann stared at her and then at the baby. The hot flush had left his face and his breathing was sound, the calm, peaceful, regular breathing of a sleeping child. As she took the warm little white parcel from Sitah, her hands and the hands of the native girl touched for the fleeting fraction of a second. Two alien worlds touched and parted again. Ann wanted to smile at the hated, feared enemy and to thank her, but something broke inside of her and for the first time in years she felt tears welling up, overflowing her and cleansing her sore heart like a warm bath. Sitah looked at her with dark, big eyes, which seemed wise and knowing, like the eyes of an animal. "Now I will go and ask the priest to pray," she said, "for I am a stupid woman and don't know how to address the gods." Once more she bowed with folded hands, and with her gait of a dancer she went down the steps and was lost in the white mist of the garden path.

"What actors they are, these natives!" Charley said, unimpressed, looking after her. "How they like beautiful words and dignified poscs! Well, Ann, I'm afraid she exploded your *goona-goona* theory—or didn't she?"

Ann was suddenly all energy and enterprise. "Where is your car, Charley?" she asked. "If I really want to pack and catch the *Tjaldane*, we have not a minute to

lose. Oh, and the *babu* has disappeared—who will press my things? I have nothing to wear—and little Jan's play suits are all too small. I'll have to buy a lot of things in Manila—"

Anderson beckoned Charley out onto the gallery and took him aside. "Has the *tuan besar* any chance?" he asked him under his breath.

"The odds are one in a thousand," Charley answered.

"Too bad," Anders said.

"Ye," said Charley. He had seen too many men die to make a fuss about it. Life was cheap near the equator, and better men than Jan Foster had gone the same way and without much ado.

By some miracle Pat had remembered to bring back her suitcases, undamaged, through storm and upheaval. When Charley and Anderson stepped back into the room, they found Jeff and Pat bent on the eternal feminine business of restoring themselves, using Pat's lipstick, her powder puff and her hairbrush in turns. The result was not startling, but pleasant enough, considering that it was four o'clock in the morning and they had gone through a night of riot, fire, flood and heartbreak all around.

"Miss Halden," Charley said in his most formal manner, "Mrs Foster here has a minor problem and you are the only person to help us solve it. Mrs Foster wants to sail on the *Tjaldane* and take her baby with her. As you know, the boat is filled to capacity; Anderson was the only passenger to get off here, and his berth has been reserved for a long time by a Siamese prince who tours the islands to see whether or not they are a good place for a chain of movie theatres. But I understand that you have

a cabin alone by yourself. Of course, it is quite an imposition on your kindness to ask you to share the cabin not only with another lady but with a sick baby also. Yet somehow I feel you could be persuaded. Ann needs the boat trip very badly—and so does the baby. Possibly it would mean only a few days of discomfort for you—until some other arrangements can be made—but it is imperative for her to get a sniff of sea air. 'It is much more difficult to make the small, unobtrusive sacrifices, but also much more gratifying,' says Katharine Myrtle in her wonderful book on good manners. . . ." Charley's eloquence petered out, and he finished falteringly, because Jeff had stiffened perceptibly while he spoke. "Even if your father practically owns the boat—" he said weakly and gave up. "Anders you talk to her," he said, hiding himself behind the smoke spirals of his cigarette.

"Really, Jeff," Anders came to his assistance, "you cannot very well refuse it. And you like babies, don't you? You would even take little Wajang with you if I would let you."

Jeff brushed the two men aside and looked straight at Ann Foster. "You want to leave Sebang? Really? And today?" she asked sternly. What she left unsaid was: Today? While your husband is between life and death? While he might want to have you near him in his last hour? But she did not say it, she only looked at Ann with the straight and severe expression of the very young.

"If I don't leave today there is no boat for another three weeks," Ann answered. "I must take little Jan away before he—before—"

Ann too left things unsaid. She did not want to tell this stranger about the two little graves in the small

cemetery of the white colony in Sebang. There are things which are too deep for words.

"Jeff darling—" Anders said tentatively.

Pat came in between them. "She can have my berth and gladly," she said vehemently. "I don't mind sleeping in a deck chair. I'll bunk myself somewhere." And she too did not say everything she had on her mind. I have been kicked around so much, a deck chair is better than many of the places where I've had to sleep, was one of her thoughts. And: after tonight nothing will seem very important to me.

Jeff took her eyes from Ann and turned to Anders with a strange, slow smile. "How silly you all are," she said. "Of course Mrs Foster can have my cabin. She doesn't even have to share it with me. She can have the whole run of it. Don't you understand yet that I am not sailing, Anders? You stupid darling! Did you really think I would leave you here alone?"

There were three gasps: from Charley, Ann and Pat. Only Anders did not gasp. He stared at the strand of dark hair that fell across Jeff's forehead, as he thought: Yes, and I could not have let you go away, ever.

"You *want* me to stay with you, don't you?" Jeff asked him across a stretch of silence. It was ridiculous that they had to make the greatest, the most secret, most sacred decision of their lives in front of three witnesses. It was like shouting it out through megaphones in the open street. They could not even touch each other's hands.

"I can't accept it," he said stubbornly, all the same. "You know what it means to live here. It's awful. It's dangerous. It breaks you if you are not strong. Ask Mrs Foster."

"Don't ask me," Ann said. "It broke me, but maybe you are different. Maybe you are made of a better material than I am. Have you noticed the special tin packs they wrap around things in the tropics? Maybe if you really love a person it works like that—keeps you from rotting away. But don't ask me. There was a time when I came here just as fresh and full of pluck as you. I wish for you that you won't leave the place as I do now—with just enough strength left to get my child away alive."

"Rubbish, Ann," Charley interrupted her. "You are making a mountain of a molehill. Three months in Amsterdam and you will be ready to conquer the world once more." He looked at her wilted figure in the creased green brocade; she was scratching her mosquito bites again. So was Pat. He lifted Jeff's hand and examined her arm, which was smooth and without a mark. "In the end it boils down to this," he said. "Some people get bitten by mosquitoes and some don't, and that is the whole difference. If the mosquitoes don't bite you, you don't get malaria, and without malaria you don't get a weak heart and a low resistance, and if your heart and your resistance are in good order you will adore the tropics and never want to live anywhere else. And now, if you don't mind, it is high time to get Ann's things packed. Cheerio."

And with this conclusive speech he took Ann down the steps and through the garden. A minute later a loud clamouring, sneezing and coughing could be heard from the street, as Minnie Mouse refused to start, as usual. It awakened the birds in the treetops and the monkeys in their house, the doves hanging in cages from the rafters of the bungalow and the coolies waiting in front to be

treated. A burst of morning noises swept over the small compound of the hospital, a first tremor stirred in the leaves, and the puddles left by the rain of the night turned into little mirrors, first green, then white, then flamingo pink. Anders and Jeff were still standing as Ann had left them, with a distance between them and a world of unspoken words like a bridge to be crossed yet.

"Sun will be up soon," said Anders.

"Yes. And the rain seems to be over," said Jeff.

Pat kept herself in the background, and they did not take any notice of her anyhow. That's me all over, she thought. That's the sort of situation into which I'm getting all the time. Now he wants to kiss the girl and I have to be in his way. Like a captured squirrel she looked around for an escape.

"I guess I better see when Dr Maverick will take care of your hand," she muttered. It was as good an exit line as she could conjure at the moment, and it took her past Mr Anderson and down the steps. So this is what's known as a pleasure cruise, she thought grimly as she went on her way. The spell of the tropics. Nights under the Southern Cross. The bunk they tell you in the travel folders. Well, I've had my spell of the tropics. Thanks. I'll take the good old Nirvana any time.

IV

SIX O'CLOCK. The sun rose behind the frieze of palm trees, wiped dry the small ponds and puddles left by the rain of the night, sucked up the heavy mist of dawn and

dabbed a spark of gold on every little wave in the harbour. The town stirred and stretched and yawned and woke up to a new day. The sailing boats of the fishermen unfurled their beautiful square sails and searched their way towards the sea with their painted eyes. Little clouds of smoke with the acrid smell of burning wood rose from the native kampongs, and dilapidated shutters creaked open in the Chinese quarters. Women with vessels on their heads went out to bring water from the well, and other women carried their loads to market. Fighting cocks crowed challengingly in their bamboo baskets, dogs were fighting for the left-overs of yesterday's feast, and the sea gulls giggled and screeched as they swooped down to salvage the refuse the cook of the *Tjaldane* emptied from a porthole into the harbour. At the pier a few coolies were sweeping the ground of the mingled debris of dead flowers, burned-out firecrackers, banana leaves which had served as plates, and soiled paper streamers. As the sun rose higher and the air became warmer, the smell of raw rubber began to overpower all other smells, while the only crane of the port fed the last bales of it into the ship's belly. On the lower deck the remaining coolies were still asleep on their mats, covered with their blankets, surrounded by their families, ducks, chickens, baskets and bundles. Two lorries came rumbling down the road and deposited the fired coolies; they came from Kampong 3, and they had decided to leave the plantation, avoid the punishment for their revolt and take advantage of the free transportation offered to them. They were a quiet, downcast lot as they slunk up the gangway and disappeared in the lower regions of the boat. On the upper deck nothing

was audible but the morning swish-swish of brooms and brushes, as the planks were rinsed and swept of the remains of the shipboard feast.

It was very quiet in the corridor between the six cabins of the first class, as most of the passengers were still asleep. George Carpenter, for the first time since his brother had been missing, had fallen asleep without the aid of a sleeping powder. He was deep in a dream and did not even wake up when the Siamese prince, an unobtrusive little man of great tact and flawless manners, moved into the upper bunk which had been Anderson's up to now. Miss Vanger rested next door in virginal slumber, proud of her sensational discoveries of Japanese influence in the South Seas. The floor of the cabin was covered with a chaotic mixture of crumpled sheets of paper, cigarette stubs and orange peels. Madame Du-four, who shared the room with her, had made a fuss before retiring, because sleeping in a smoky room meant ruin to her voice. She snored softly in the upper berth, though she had retained her hurt and outraged expression even in her sleep. Herr and Frau Ritter, opposite in Cabin D, also snored. On the little table they had lined up the photos of a house, a dog, the Stefanskirche and their children in old-fashioned pre-war clothes when they were still babies. Photos of the things they had had to give up, silly little memories they carried around the world. Herr and Frau Ritter, after many months, had been ashore and they had not liked it. The ground had swayed under their feet, the people had seemed ugly and unfriendly, the streets dirty and the food more than dubious. They had agreed that there was only one place in the world worth living in—Vienna. And now they

slept, softly snoring, rotund and self-satisfied, two droll, pathetic little Ahasueruses wandering around a convulsive globe and eternally haunted by the nostalgia for a Viennese cake which bore the extraordinary name of Gugelhupf.

Mrs Gould in the next cabin did not sleep, partly because it was the habit of a lifetime with her to be up and around at sunrise; and partly because she worried about her cabin mate, Pat, who had rushed in for just one moment, had dumped her suitcases on the floor and been off again.

"What's the matter, baby?"

"Nothing, Mrs Gould. I just drove Miss Halden to the boat and now I've got to get back to the hospital. I'll tell you all about it later."

"Anybody ill?"

"Anybody? Everybody, Mrs Gould. And we'll get a sick baby on board and Mrs Foster, and she's half crazy and she don't know that her husband is going to die—but I've no time now, I've got to help the doc."

She was gone, and Mrs Gould put on her bedroom slippers, took her Bible and her eyeglasses and shuffled on deck to keep an eye on the gangway for Pat's return.

Vandengraaf had been utterly worn out. The revelation that there was such a thing as second sight, telepathy and trance, and that he of all people—after a life of fake and swindle and hokum—should discover the gift in himself had been too much for him. He had broken up the chess game, muttered a weak excuse and slumped down on his bed in his crumpled white suit, tossing around for a while and then falling into a deep black well of sleep and exhaustion. His face with the

bald head and the big nose stuck out from the bunk like a miniature landscape with dunes and grass and mountains, while he wandered through a labyrinth of dreams which took him back all the way to the small Galician village where he had been a child.

The upper bunk was empty, because Mynheer Van Halden had been summoned to his daughter's state-room. He was sitting on Jeff's berth, his hands folded between his knees, his head slightly bent to conceal his face. He appeared as cool and calm as he always did when he gambled for a big stake: in business, in love, in life. Jeff knelt on the floor, throwing her things into her steamer trunk helter-skelter, grateful that she had something to keep her hands busy while she told her father what she had to tell.

"... That's just it, Father, my pet, and you are the one to understand me in such matters better than anyone else. I'm not marrying him *in spite* of the dangers and hardships, just the contrary. It's *because* his life is hard and difficult, and sometimes even dangerous, that I want to stay with him. I suppose I am your daughter, that's all there is to it. Last night, when we drove through the plantation, it was strange—it suddenly felt like coming home. That's my world too, Father, that's where I belong and where I want to live and—maybe—where I can be of some use. There is so much to be done, so much, my pet! Build new kampongs and better ones, cleaner ones, have a little school for the coolie children, teach the mothers a bit of cleanliness and sanitation, give them living conditions worthy of human beings—and there won't be riots and running amuck, believe me. Don't laugh at me—you'll probably say that every Ameri-

can is a slum clearer at heart and that the coolies like it better to be dirty. It's not true. In Bunker Hall we did a lot for our darkies and they liked it, and this won't be much different. You told me yourself that some of the government's plantations are examples of sound colonization; why could not your plantation be the same? Maybe I could help make it so, in my own small way."

Van Halden murmured something about private enterprise and shareholders and profits and dividends, but Jeff swept this away with one characteristic gesture of her head, and the dark strand of hair came down her forehead and had to be blown away again.

"Don't tell me about your dividends, because I won't listen. I am not such a fool as you think, I know a little bit about your business, too. There is too much rubber as it is—or why should an International Agreement have to be drafted to keep the production of rubber down and the price up? Aha, that's where the trouble is. Whatever happens to your dividends, you take it out on the coolie, keep the labour cheap and the profit high. You belong to the old school of planters, pet, forgive me for saying so, and you never stop to think of what your profits are made. Of dead babies and sick mothers, and miserable, wretched men who are so full of hatred and fear that something is bound to snap in them and send them off burning and killing."

"Now you are talking like Fong," Halden said with a smile—and never would he let Jeff know how hard it was to press this smile onto his face. "Presumably you have listened too much to the Chinese agitator, my little *meisje*."

She considered this for a moment but didn't find it

worth a reply. "Look here, Father," she went on, "if I had decided to spend the next season in New York with you, you would have given me fur coats and a new pearl necklace and a companion secretary and parties and a suite at the Pierre and a month in Florida. Now, wouldn't you? Well, all I shall need in Lombok will be my old linen dresses and a big medicine chest for the coolies. Will you give me the money you save by my marriage for a dowry? So I can start a little school and a little clinic, and you can let them have their power plant and electric refrigeration and a good filtration plant for their water and—"

"Wait, wait!" Halden called out. "You are already talking about the dowry, and I have not yet agreed to this sudden, insane wedding. Do you realize that you are not even twenty-one? And that my consent is necessary before you can marry?"

"You would not want me to stay in Lombok without being married to Anders?" Jeff said brightly. "As for me, I don't put great importance upon that little formality, and whether Captain Brookhuis mumbles a few words over us or not won't make a bit of difference to Anders and me. But I understand morals in the colonial society are very strict, and you do want me to do the conventional thing, don't you?"

She was only half joking, but Halden recognized the devilish spark of mockery in her eyes and he could not help chuckling about this crazy, valiant child of his. "If getting married on the spur of the moment and leaving your father alone with the unused half of a round-the-world ticket is the conventional thing—" he said, leaving the sentence unfinished. The next moment he found

himself whirling in a hurricane of hugs and carresses and pats and squeezes and kisses, which fell down on him, profuse and vehement like the rain of the night before. The last time Jeff had treated him like that had been on her third birthday when he had given her a pony, with whom she had passionately fallen in love. He remembered it now and it made him defenceless and soft; ever since the boat had put into port he had had this odd feeling of melting away, of thawing and softening, as if the very substance of which he was made had undergone a chemical change. He came up for air, holding Jeff off with one hand while he straightened his thin white hair. "Enough, enough," he said. "Save some of it for the bridegroom. Where is the young scoundrel, anyway?"

"He had to be patched up and washed behind the ears," Jeff reported. "But he will be here presently." Suddenly she grew very serious. "Father," she said softly, "don't think it's easy for me to leave you like this—it's just something that's stronger than I am. And don't think that I don't understand what this means to you. Don't you think you will feel more at peace now—and—forget the past and begin to think about the future?"

"The future!" Mynheer Van Halden said with a wistful smile.

"Yes, Father, we'll make Lombok the best rubber estate in the whole Netherlands Indies, and you'll be proud when you come to visit us, and we'll visit you and you won't be alone, because we'll have to send the children to school in Holland and we'll have to park them with you most of the time—"

"Heavens, Jeff," he said, flabbergasted, "you haven't made plans for your offspring yet?"

"Certainly. We have adopted a little native boy to begin with—he has a little concussion of the brain just now, but he'll be all right in a few days, says Dr Grader. And he is such a sweet, intelligent little fellow. And now, if you don't mind, I want to put on a clean dress, and you must tell the captain that he has to marry us off before the *Tjaldane* leaves port."

"I assume that you have spoken to him yourself; you didn't leave much for me to do or to decide, Josephine."

"No, this is your business. You are the skipper. Now go, my pet, I don't want to be responsible for another delay in the sailing schedule. And—Father—I need to be alone for a few minutes—I have to collect myself—there is such a lot I have to think about."

Mynheer Van Halden went on his way to Captain Brookhuis' quarters. He was a very old, very tired man, much older and much more tired than last night. If my hair hadn't been white before, this would have been the night to make it turn white, he thought with a brave show of self-mockery. He had to stop three times, on his way from the cabin to the upper deck, to regulate his heart. It did not hurt now and it was not cramped and pounding with fear any longer, but it beat very slowly and very weakly; a little, fluttering bird which might fly off any minute, never to come back. You can't kill a man and be happy, he remembered. No, I presume not. I'll be very lonesome without Josephine, but I've been lonesome all my life. And I won't live long, it'll soon be over, and I'll be so much the better for it. Funny to think that even yesterday I was still afraid of the end,

Now I am looking forward to it. I took my revenge like a man—and I'll take my punishment like a man. No judge could have pronounced a juster verdict: I took his father and he takes my child. Let's see what Captain Brookhuis will have to say to the news.

He stopped at the foot of the narrow stairs which led up to the captain's quarters, and his hand went to his heart; for there was Anders Anderson, emerging from the doctor's cabin, and he looked more like his father than ever before. His right arm was in a sling, and he was dressed in a very clean and well-pressed if somewhat too short white suit. It was one of Dr Maverick's suits and he felt quite uncomfortable in it. He was still utterly bewildered; the tetanus injection he had received buzzed in his temples, and he began to feel that he had not slept for twenty-four hours; he was drunk with the peculiar drunkenness of great fatigue, and he had a faint suspicion that he might be only imagining things. He carried his happiness like something most fragile, and he was afraid it all might burst and disappear like a soap bubble the moment he took it and held it and pressed it to his heart.

"Hello, Anderson," said Mynheer Van Halden, president of the Nitarc and master over Lombok. "I hope you are not badly hurt?"

"It's nothing, Mynheer. All I need is to lie in the sun and lick my wound like a dog and it'll heal in no time."

"My daughter reported that there was a little trouble on the Estate."

"Yes, and I'm sorry about it. But such things will always happen, Mynheer. Everything is under perfect control again."

"I understand that Jan Foster will be laid up for quite

some time and the assistant manager is on home leave. I'm afraid you will have to take over for the time being, Anderson."

Anderson gasped and got all tangled up. "Mynheer—this is an honour—I assure you—I appreciate the confidence you put in me and I will try to live up to it—I don't know what to say—I am so happy—"

Van Halden examined the young giant inch by inch. Seen from so close, he did not look exactly like his father. His eyes were deeper set and his mouth firmer. Still, it was the hardest thing Van Halden had ever done in his life: trust his little girl to him. He wanted to say something kind to young Anderson, but it got lost somewhere in his throat, which hurt as if he had swallowed a jagged piece of rock.

"You win, Anderson," he said instead, turned away and proceeded to climb up the stairs to the captain's quarters.

V

CAPTAIN BROOKHUIS had only scant experience in conducting a religious service, because most of the time there was a missionary on board to hold the Sunday service, and if he had to do it himself, he raced through it in a most embarrassed and perfunctory manner. Somehow he felt himself to be not good enough a man to pronounce the word of God. Once in a while he had by necessity held the funeral service for one of the crew. For such occasions he read the verse: "Though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. . . ." Then he spoke a few words, which his staccato voice turned into some sort of a command, anchored his jawbone tightly so as not to quiver or to cry, because he was a softhearted man at the bottom of his salty soul, and when he had watched the canvas parcel slip into the sea, he turned abruptly and went back onto the bridge to hide his grief.

This, however, he realized sadly, would not quite do for the wedding ceremony of Mynheer Van Halden's only daughter, and Captain Brookhuis found himself in quite a quandary. In his embarrassment he turned to Mrs Gould for support, and together they decided on the verse from the Song of Songs: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." It seemed most appropriate for its beautiful sentiment as well as for the fact that the quay was still steaming with the moisture of last night's rain which evaporated under the tropical morning sun.

It was a brief ceremony which took place in the salon, where the stale smell of beer and gin and smoke from the late poker party still hung heavily in the air. The ventilator buzzed, the hundred strange voices, cries and noises of the harbour outside sounded Jeff Halden's bridal march. The captain relapsed only once into the valley of the shadow of death but was put on the right path by the fat *hofmeester's* embarrassed coughing and by Mrs Gould's discreet prompting. Jeff called "I do" before she was asked, while Anders Anderson was so completely bewildered, embarrassed, overwhelmed and confused that he missed his cue and had to be nudged by Charley, his best man, and almost pushed by Mynheer

Van Halden into declaring his willingness to take Josephine for his wedded wife.

The *Tjaldane* had been scheduled to sail at eight o'clock, the engines were under steam and the pilot's launch was tied alongside, ready for the departure. But now it was almost twenty minutes past eight, and Captain Brookhuis became impatient. The gong sounded urgently, hustling all visitors ashore. There was no time or inclination for big words and a sentimental farewell between Jeff and her father.

"Take good care of yourself, my pet."

"Anderson, don't let her run wild. Give her some rein but not too much. She likes to take the bit between her teeth, and then you can't hold her."

"I'll do my best, Mynheer. Of course, it won't be as simple as running a plantation—"

"And don't forget to take your medicine regularly, Father. Twenty drops before each meal—"

"I would suggest you let her have a typhoid vaccination before you take her to Lombok, Anderson. It's safer—and, as you can be sure that she will stick her nose into every smelly native hut—"

"All ashore, all ashore, all ashore!"

"I'll have to drive out to the Estate at once, Mynheer; there's bound to be some confusion until the new coolies are broken in—"

"Well, it's not my idea of a honeymoon, but it's your choice, children—"

"We'll make up for it when we go on leave and visit you, my angel—"

"All ashore! Last call! All ashore!"

Suddenly Jeff saw nothing for tears. "Forgive me,

Father, for being so selfish," she whispered into Halden's ear. "I can't help it—"

"Get off the boat, you nuisance," he answered gruffly. "You have cost the line a nice fat lot of money as it is, with all these delays."

"Goodbye, Mynheer—and thanks. For everything."

"Good-bye. Get off now. Jeff-*meisje*—are you happy?"

"Don't ask silly questions, my sweetheart."

"I'm happy too," Mynheer Van Halden lied gallantly. He let go of her hand. Yesterday it had been the hand of a little baby, now it was the hand of a grown-up woman who was leaving him alone. He closed his fist as if to keep the little bit of warmth in his palm for another minute.

All passengers had come on deck, for leaving a port was always an interesting event. There was still some of the fresh tang of morning in the air, and a little breeze tugged the Dutch flag and the pennant of the S.-B.-M. Linc. Now the gangway was pulled up and the ropes were loosened. The engines began to churn the water to foam. Native *perahus*, clustered around the boat with the frantic cries of vendors hoping to sell their goods at the very last minute. White-clad planters and officials leaving the gangway, a fierce exchange of shouts and laughter between the coolies lined up at the rail of the lower deck and the crowd on the pier. The sky, washed clear by the storm of the night, and every line of the shore sharply etched into its silvery blue. The Dutch windmill, the old Portuguese fort, the hills of Kuri, the mountains far away, their heads still covered with clouds of white flannel, green leathery palms and white coral sand along

the little bay, and bamboo huts gingerly walking on stilts into the water. This was the shore, this was Jeff's new home. A triangle of water appeared between the boat and the shore as the *Tjaldane* pushed off; it grew, it widened; banana rinds were floating in it, yesterday's flowers, coconut shells, scraps of bamboo. A few boys dived into the water, brown streaks, golden bodies, white flashing teeth; they tried swimming after the boat for a short while and then gave it up. First there was still Jeff's face and then still her figure in the white linen dress with the red turban, clearly discernible among the others, and then her handkerchief, a little flag of farewell, and then she was only a white pinprick in the pattern of the distant crowd. And then the *Tjaldane* had completed her turn and left the shore behind, pointing towards the open sea. Blinding radiance, sailboats gliding ahead, the first flat atolls, the distance, the far horizon, forever unattainable. . . .

What now? thought Halden, staring into the void ahead of him. There was still the possibility of a merger of the S.-B.-M. Line with an important American steamship line to be tackled as soon as he reached the United States. It had seemed quite important and exciting, an exhilarating gamble, when he had started out on this trip. Now it seemed stale and insignificant like everything else.

Somebody patted his shoulder; it was an apologetic, cautious pat.

"Does this seem an appropriate moment to finish our game of chess?" Vandengraaf asked, and it sounded as if he were offering a drowning man a life belt.

"You *are* a mind reader, Vandengraaf," said Myn-

heer Van Halden and, leaning heavily on the proffered arm, he went back into the salon.

VI

THE SIGN "Please do not disturb" was dangling from the doorknob of Dr Maverick's cabin, as usual. Pat stopped and looked at it doubtfully. Today it might mean that the doctor really wanted to be left alone; he deserves some rest after what he's been through this night, she thought. She looked at her arm and at the sign and again at her arm. The thing had turned blue, and the arm had begun to swell and there was an unpleasant little throb inside. Maybe if I let it get worse, he'll be mad at me, she thought. The fact was that she was glad to have an excuse for seeing the doctor. She had wanted for many hours to see him and talk to him. He was the nicest guy she knew—after Mr Anderson, that is. Just now she was not even quite sure if Mr Anderson was as nice as she had thought him for a while. He must be pretty dumb to get himself lassoed like that, she thought. Sort of a shotgun wedding. Well, maybe the papa has handed him a lot of dough together with the daughter. Pat felt lonely and disappointed, but her little show-girl soul was too inarticulate or too humble to use such high-sounding words for her emotional condition. What I need is a pick-up, she thought instead. She knelt down to push the curtain aside and peep into the doctor's room, but all she could see was his big white tennis shoes, sticking out

over the edge of his berth. Maybe he's asleep, she thought. He didn't snore, but somehow she didn't think Dr Maverick would snore even if he was asleep. She gave a deep sigh and looked once more at her arm.

"Pat, stop the hell scraping at my door like a mouse and come in," Dr Maverick called unexpectedly; it gave her a start and she jumped up.

"My, you've got me all jittery," she said, unhooking the door and entering the cabin. It was like coming home after a dreadful, dangerous voyage. Caesar crossing the Alps was nothing compared with Pat traversing the experiences of last night. The doctor scrutinized her from his bunk, where he was lying, stripped to the waist as usual, his feet propped up on the counterpane. He was the sort of man who could never find a bed sufficiently long for his size. So was Mr Anderson, Pat guessed; but she brushed the little thought aside. That's over and no use acting like a fool about it, she told herself.

"Why don't you sleep, kid?" Dr Maverick asked her. "This is not a marathon, you know. You've been on your feet for more than twenty hours. You should be in your bunk and sound asleep by now."

"That's just it," Pat answered. "Seems I'm so tired I can't sleep. The moment I close my eyes I see all sorts of things. I just got a bit too much of everything, I guess."

"Possibly. You went through water and fire to be purified, as it is prescribed in the rites of the Freemasons."

This went over her head. "Mrs Foster's asleep, though," she said "And she's got plenty to think of, more than me. I mean, couldn't you give me a hypo like you gave her?"

"Nothing doing, young lady. I had to give it to Mrs Foster before something snapped out of joint, mentally

speaking. But you are a sound girl. Heavens, I never knew before last night what a sound, plucky, strong girl you are. You know, Pat, you behaved really marvelously. I pay you my deepest respect."

"Me?" Pat asked, flabbergasted, for she was not used to this sort of praise, and she felt small and guilty for more than one reason.

"You don't know what help you've been to me and to everybody else, Pat."

"A nice fat lot of help I've been! If Mr Anderson hadn't knocked me out I might have caused murder and revolution," she confessed shamefacedly. "After that I realized that I simply had to pull myself together if we wanted to get through alive."

Maverick laughed, deeply amused. "What a realist you are, Pat, what a wonderful, wise realist! So he knocked you out and he kissed Miss Halden's hand and—"

"Yes, and he was right," Pat said heatedly.

"Why did you let Miss Halden take him away from you? Why the hell didn't you put up a fight? You are just as good as she is, Pat, every bit as good." Dr Maverick took his feet down and sat up, to drive his point home more impressively.

Pat looked him straight in the eye. "No, I'm not and I know it, Doctor. I'm sort of—like the things you get at the bargain counter: a bit soiled here and a bit faded there and a bit cracked and a bit chipped all around."

"What of it? My grandmother used to say that cracked plates always last longest. Want a cigarette?"

He lighted the native cigarette for her, and the spicy taste soothed her nerves. For a while they did not speak, just watched the smoke drift up in thin bluish layers to

be wafted away through the porthole. The engine was throbbing, the boat had reached the open sea and begun to rock gently.

"Did you stay with Mrs Foster until she fell asleep?"

"Sure. You wanted me to, didn't you? And that baby of hers is the sweetest thing you've seen in your life. Can you imagine, he even knows Malay. Not a year old and he babbles some Malay all the time. He's doing fine. Temperature down to a hundred."

"You would make a swell nurse, Pat."

"Oh, I guess it's only what they taught me when I was laid up in that lousy hospital in Athens. It's a sort of routine which gets into your bones very quick. Tell me, Doctor, did you give Mrs Foster that hypo so she wouldn't learn that her husband was dead?"

"When we left the port he was still alive," Dr Maverick said thoughtfully. "If he can hold his own for another twenty-four hours, we may get him through yet. If he lives he won't be strong enough to be a manager of a rubber plantation any longer, but he could live peacefully somewhere in Holland and play bridge at the Planters' Club every Thursday. I've seen a lot of his sort back in Amsterdam."

"If he pulls through it's a miracle, that's what Dr Grader said, isn't it?"

"Well, in a way—"

"And you've done it. You've done it, Doc," Pat said and took a deep breath.

He scrutinized her with his dry smile through the veil of cigarette smoke. "You're a born hero worshipper, Pat," he said. "But lay off me. I'll tell you something: I'm a bit cracked and soiled and chipped myself."

"Are you? Really?"

"Yes—or I would not be an alcoholic ship's doctor on a third-rate boat, that's obvious, isn't it? There is always something which sends a fellow skidding down and then there is no stopping. With you it was a broken ankle. With me—" He squashed out his cigarette and threw it onto the floor, where two big, busy cockroaches came eagerly running to examine it. Pat waited, but he did not finish the sentence.

"Feel like telling me about it, Doc?" she said. She liked him very much, he had been good to her and she wanted to be good to him.

"What's the use, Pat? It's all science and a lot of five-syllable words in Greek and Latin which you wouldn't understand. But it boils down to the fact that I've killed eleven children. It's enough to put a guy out of circulation, isn't it?"

"Oh—" Pat said with a start. "It can't be as bad as it sounds," she added after she had thought it over.

"It's been worse, Pat, believe me. We experimented with a new serum in the hospital—you know, a serum which today saves hundreds of lives. But then it was new, and I must have made a mistake or the serum must have been polluted by something, we never found out which. But eleven children died through my fault, and there were eleven mothers I had to lie to and eleven fathers to curse my name. It takes a lot of whisky to forget such a thing."

Pat clenched her fists and opened them again. "Maybe you'll start to forget it after last night," she said. "I saw you work, I saw you save one life after another. That big, fat Dutch nurse told me she had never seen any

surgeon as good as you, and she had seen plenty in her time. You know something? Your hands have always been a bit unsteady. I didn't think you could operate with those hands. But now they are steady. It's funny, isn't it?"

Dr Maverick looked at his hands. He stretched his fingers and held them poised; yes, they were steady now. He flexed them again and lit another cigarette. "Yes, it's funny," he said. "I should have been scared to do that difficult operation, but I'll tell you something, Pat: I was as happy as an actor playing a big part. They call it 'performing an operation.' By Jove, it's something like a performance. There is nothing like the feel of that good old knife in your hand if you are meant to be a surgeon. I wish we had less dysentery on this boat and more appendectomies."

Pat laughed. "Maybe you would like to cut my arm off, just to show off as a performer?" she said.

"What's the matter with your arm?"

"Nothing. I've got a scratch. It's sort of throbbing."

Dr Maverick looked at the blue-edged mark on Pat's arm and then into her face. "That's no scratch, that's a bite," he said.

"Yes, that's what it really is, and I don't know where I got it. If I got it when I had that fight with Miss Halden I guess it's all right and I shouldn't bother you with it. But if it's from that coolie who bit me when I poured the iodine into his wound, I'm afraid I might get the rabies."

Dr Maverick leaned back and burst into laughter. Pat stared at him for a moment, half annoyed and half amused, and then she too began to laugh.

"I guess, I just don't know nothing about medical

things," she said good-naturedly. The doctor opened his cabinet and brought out a little tray with gauze, mercurochrome and other antiseptics. Small as her injury was, Pat discovered the same intent professional expression on his face that she had seen in a glimpse through the door of the surgery in Sebang before the operation.

"Let's clean it out, just to be on the safe side," he said, taking the arm into his fingers. She liked the feel of his hand on her skin. She had been hungry for the touch of a friendly hand for a long time. "I like you, Doc," she said. She saw only his red hair and his freckled, bare back as he bent over her arm.

He did not look up, but he said: "I like you too, Pat. More than you think."

He went on treating the small injury, and there was a sharp sting as he clipped the edges of the wound straight. "Does it hurt?" he asked her.

"Not much. I'm okay. Go ahead!"

He finished it, put a plaster over it and kept her hand in his for another second.

"Think some whisky would do you good?" he asked her.

"Thanks, no. I'm on the wagon."

He shot one of his quick, searching glances at her. She didn't know whether he was hiding a smile as he went to the cabinet and stored away his tray.

"So am I," he said as he came back from the corner.

Yes, now she could see that he smiled as he stretched out on his berth again and propped his feet on the counterpane.

"Come here for a moment, Pat," he said. "I have to talk to you."

She went over, and he pulled her down until she sat on the edge of the narrow berth.

"Why couldn't we go on the wagon together?" he asked her.

"Yes—why not?" she said.

"Listen, Pat," he said, and now he took her hand and gently placed it over his heart, so that she could feel it beat and pound in the hollow of her palm. "Listen, Pat—if I should leave this boat at Manila—and go back to the United States—and try to start all over again—would you stick to me?"

"Sure," said Pat.

There was a whole heaven full of Sunday waffles and chintz curtains ahead of her.

THE END